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LITURGY AND EXPERIENCE:  
"A CONSIDERATION OF ISSUES INVOLVED  
IN LITURGICAL RENEWAL

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the  
School of Theology at Claremont

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
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## INTRODUCTION

As a result of my involvement in the chapel program of the School of Theology at Claremont, the problem of liturgical renewal has become focused for me in a particular way. This focusing has resulted specifically from my observation of and participation in a variety of different "liturgical experiments" at the School. The experiments fall into two general categories--"contemporary" and "experimental liturgies." The "contemporary liturgies" retain traditional forms but use contemporary language, music, and styles. The "experimental" events begin *de novo* (at least, that is the usual intention) and attempt to create liturgical forms without reference to the church's liturgical traditions. Both of these kinds of events have, however, failed to capture the imagination of the seminary community or become viable vehicles for the contemporary celebration of the gospel. "Contemporary worship" has usually failed in that for many it does not have the "feel" of specific relevance to persons' actual life experience; it does not express the rhythms of life with which the participants are familiar. And "experimental worship" has failed in that it often deals with trivialities and neglects the decisive issues of Christian existence. Some of these failures are, of course, the result of faulty liturgical design and

liturgical insensitivity (or ignorance) on the part of the participants. But these problems have not seemed altogether decisive. For me, these failures have generated the growing conviction that the fundamental problem is larger than either of these explanations and that it is only partly liturgical. I have become increasingly convinced that the liturgical life of Christian communities is intimately bound up with other dimensions of Christian existence and that it can be adequately understood only in terms of its relations to these other dimensions.

Christian liturgy is always a celebration of the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ. But it is also always an attempt to articulate and affirm the specific mode of Christian existence in which the worshiping community participates. Liturgy deteriorates if it does not maintain an objective presentation of the gospel. But it also deteriorates when it fails to catch up in its celebration the rhythms of person's subjective experience. The actual problems of doing Christian liturgy become most clearly focused, moreover, in this second aspect of liturgy. The liturgical traditions of the church provide a rich store of forms for celebrating God's grace in Jesus Christ. But finding just those forms which most accurately and vividly express our life experience as Christians is much more difficult. It is between these two aspects of Christian

liturgy that contemporary liturgical renewal is focused: can liturgical forms be found which authentically celebrate the gospel *and* vividly express our own life experience? Most "contemporary worship" has failed to be directly relevant to our life experience. And most "experimental worship" has failed to celebrate the gospel authentically. My conviction that Christian liturgy must be seen (and renewed) in relation to other dimensions of Christian existence is generated out of these two kinds of liturgical failure.

In one sense, the desire for liturgical change is already a recognition of the relatedness between liturgy and the dynamics of Christian living. That is, contemporary attempts to change liturgical forms are motivated by an awareness that liturgy and life should be congruent and mutually supportive but that currently they are not. The renewal attempts, therefore, are an implicit recognition that liturgy can be alive only when it is celebrated in a way relevant to the lives of its participants. But the conclusion which most liturgical-renewal attempts seem to have drawn from this recognition is too simple and one-sided. The perception that liturgy and life must be related is understood to mean that (since they are not at present) the liturgy must be renewed to make it relevant to the actual lives of modern persons. Thus, the problem of relating liturgy and contemporary existence is understood as an

exclusively *liturgical* problem; that is, one which can be solved simply by changing the liturgy.

Now, my perception that *most* attempts to do "contemporary" or "experimental worship" have failed to achieve genuine renewal has forced me to examine again this conclusion that the solution is *exclusively* liturgical. The following essay is a result of this re-examination. The basic position of it is *still* that, if liturgy is to have a significant role in the lives of Christian communities, liturgy and the dynamics of actual living must exist in intimate relatedness. But the conclusion now drawn from this is different. That is, I no longer see the problem as an exclusively liturgical one.

Attempts to relate these two dimensions of Christian existence by changing only the liturgy have failed (I have come to think) because they have accepted as "given" the secularity of the modern world. They have not adequately perceived the deep and irreconcilable differences between Christian existence and secular existence. And the attempts to relate the liturgy to some "secular Christianity" have failed in one of two ways. When the attempts have been to do "contemporary worship," the liturgies have failed to catch the spirit of secularity because they retained traditional Christian forms. And when the attempts have been to do "experimental worship," the liturgies have most often

failed to articulate a genuinely Christian vision of reality. The conclusion I now draw from this is that genuine liturgical renewal cannot be achieved simply by changing liturgical forms, practices, or styles. Instead, changes *both* in the liturgy *and* in contemporary Christian existence must occur if the liturgical life of the church is to achieve its goal of a genuinely modern *and* authentically Christian style of celebration.

The fundamental intent of this essay is to discuss in more detail the basic issues involved in such a more comprehensive approach to liturgical renewal. Thus, as well as envisioning a process of changing liturgical forms, we will also direct our attention to the problems of Christian existence in the modern world. We will try to understand the differences between secular and Christian structures of existence and point to one possibility for renewing contemporary Christian life. Throughout this essay, however, it should be remembered that the positions and conclusions presented are those which have grown out of my own grappling with the perceived failure of liturgical renewal. It is my attempt to "make sense" of where we Christians are liturgically and existentially in the modern world. Because it is an attempt to *understand* our current situation, it is not an experimentally-tested program. The ideas, envisionings, and proposals presented below need to be tried out in



the crucible of the actual life of a Christian community to discover to what degree they are valid. But this "trying out" has not yet been done and awaits the opportunity.

The essay itself is comprised of four chapters. The first is an examination of two features of the current situation (secularity and a "counter-secular movement") in an attempt to determine the ways in which these features support or undermine Christian existence. Chapter two is actually a continuation of chapter one. It seeks to point toward one way by which concrete Christian existence in the modern world can be renewed. It will be recognized from what has been said above that these two chapters are intimately related to liturgical renewal--that liturgical renewal is fully possible only as Christian existence also is renewed. A basic understanding of Christian existence is *presupposed* in these first two chapters rather than explicitly explained. The understanding is drawn from that of John Cobb in *The Structure of Christian Existence*.<sup>1</sup> Although Cobb's understanding is presupposed in the essay itself, a brief summary of this understanding is included as Appendix A. The feature of Christian existence on which we will focus most in the body of the essay is that of "experience"--the subjective dynamics of persons' concrete

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<sup>1</sup>John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Structure of Christian Existence* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967).

living. This focus has been chosen because it seems to provide the greatest clarity for understanding the difference between secular and Christian existences and for envisioning a renewed Christian existence and a renewed liturgy in the modern world.

Chapter three begins more specifically to address the problems of renewing the liturgy itself by examining the relationship between liturgy and experience. That the liturgy can be renewed is partly a function of the renewal of Christian existence; but it is also partly a function of the way the relation between liturgy and the experiential dynamics of Christian existence are understood. This chapter begins with Jack Coogan's aesthetic analysis of liturgy which he developed in his dissertation, "Worship as Expressive Form."<sup>2</sup> Coogan's analysis is not an exhaustive one; that is, it does not attempt to explain *all* the different features of liturgical celebration. But it is particularly helpful for the purposes of this essay because it gives specific insights about *doing* liturgy--and thus, also about how it might be done differently. Also, Coogan's dissertation provides suggestive hints about the relation of liturgical activity and subjective experience. In chapter three, we will begin with Coogan's dissertation in order to give

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<sup>2</sup>William Jack Coogan, "Worship as Expressive Form," (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, School of Theology at Claremont, CA, 1967).

some direction to these issues of liturgical renewal.

Although this essay presupposes the renewal of contemporary Christian existence as an integral part of liturgical renewal, it does not affirm that liturgical forms and styles themselves are in no need of renewal. Instead, *both* the liturgy *and* the experiential dynamics of Christian existence need to change if adequate renewal is to be possible. Chapter four, then, is an attempt to envision a process by which the *specifically liturgical* tasks of renewing the liturgy can be performed. Rather than a set of suggestions for liturgical practice or text and rubrics of a "renewed liturgy," this chapter proposes an experimental context within which worshiping communities might be able to generate new (and perhaps also "renewed") liturgical forms. This chapter especially (because it is more specific than the others) needs to be tested in the actual life of a worshiping community. Undoubtedly, the proposed process needs many refinements; and whether it will be helpful at all can only be judged after use. But there is one feature of the process which seems especially valuable and which (I am convinced) must be part of any liturgical renewal process. This process features an attempt to generate liturgical forms which are both genuinely Christian in the structure of existence they articulate and specifically relevant to the life experience of their participants. This is a

valuable feature because this is the real goal of liturgical renewal. Whether this essay contributes to that goal now awaits its practical application.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE IMPACT OF THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD ON CHRISTIAN EXISTENCE AND THE CHURCH'S LITURGY

#### I.

The liturgy<sup>1</sup> of the church is intimately interrelated with Christian existence.<sup>2</sup> And to understand the centrality of the role which the liturgy has played in the life of the church, one must also understand that the liturgy has functioned in a relationship of mutual dependence with the subjective dynamics of Christian existence. To use

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<sup>1</sup>"Liturgy" is referred to rather technically in this paragraph and subsequently throughout the paper. This understanding of liturgy is heavily dependent on the work of William Jack Coogan, *Worship as Expressive Form* (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, School of Theology at Claremont, CA, 1967); Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (New York: New American Library, 1942); and Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953). A more thorough discussion of this understanding is included in Chapter 3 of this paper. Also, a discussion of a way of distinguishing "liturgy" and "worship" is included in Appendix B.

<sup>2</sup>"Christian existence" is used throughout this paper in the sense in which John Cobb uses it in his *The Structure of Christian Existence* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967). One of the characteristic features of Christian existence is that it emerges out of a radicalization of both the demand of God and the availability of God's grace. The entirety of this essay assumes (rather than explains) an understanding of Cobb's meaning for "Christian existence" and an appreciation of the role of grace in that structure of existence. A brief summary of Cobb's exposition however, is included in Appendix A.

aesthetic categories, liturgy is an attempt to articulate the "significant form"<sup>3</sup> of human experience; and *Christian* liturgy is the attempt of the church to create in the perceptible media of speech, song, dance, and pantomime symbolic forms which articulate the dynamic and subjective patterns of those special and paradigmatic experiences in which Christian existence and its structures are most clearly revealed. Thus, Christian existence supplies the "content" of the liturgy. Christian existence, on the other hand, has itself been dependent on liturgy in important ways. John Cobb has asserted that the worship of the church (i.e., liturgy) has been the fundamental way by which persons have entered and been maintained in Christian existence.<sup>4</sup> And Wilfred Bailey says that "worship keeps reminding us of what faith 'looks like' in our corporate and personal lives."<sup>5</sup> Though liturgy does not aim at producing one pre-determined kind of response on the part of the members of the congregation, its impact over a period of time is potent. By articulating the structures of Christian experience, liturgy

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<sup>3</sup>Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, pp. 174, 186, 188-190; Langer, *Feeling and Form*, pp. 23, 24-25, 32. Coogan, pp. 24f.

<sup>4</sup>John Cobb, *Is It Too Late?* (Beverly Hills, CA: Bruce, 1972), p. 137.

<sup>5</sup>Wilfred M. Bailey, *Awakened Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 75.

communicates the values that are implicit in Christian existence. Continual exposure to and participation in liturgy over a period of time makes one sensitive to these values and enables persons to assimilate them and integrate them into the value structures of their own lives.<sup>6</sup> For example, if we assume that God's grace is a constituent part of every human experience, and if we assume that liturgy articulates the patterns of those experiences in which grace is most obviously present, then participation in liturgy can result in one's becoming increasingly sensitive to the presence of grace. This may result in persons' being able to identify grace more readily in their concrete experience in the world, being able to make decisions in terms of their perception of the presence of grace, and being able to structure their lives so that grace may be more effective in them. Though no one concrete response may come from any one particular liturgy, the impact of liturgical participation is the strengthening and heightening of Christian existence in the lives of persons.

This suggests the intimacy of the relation between liturgy and Christian existence. Christian existence is the "content" of liturgy, it is what liturgy expresses; and

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. Coogan, p. 22; and Dorothy Lee, *Freedom and Culture* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1959), pp. 1f., 78f., 162f.

the final impact of liturgy is the heightening and strengthening of Christian existence in the lives of persons. There are, of course, other ways in which the church has sought to strengthen and intensify Christian existence in the lives of its members, but down to the present time liturgy or corporate worship events have been the primary way of doing this. Because of this close relation, the liturgical life of the church can not adequately be understood simply in its own terms; it must be seen in terms of the broader issues of Christian existence, in terms of the ways in which the concrete lives of persons are experienced, structured, and understood. Similarly, many liturgical problems are not soluble simply by rearranging liturgical furniture; instead, the relation between liturgical forms and the concrete dynamics of Christian experience must be understood and brought to bear on the problems. Liturgy can continue to strengthen and heighten Christian existence only if the intimacy of the relation between liturgy and Christian existence is recognized.

This relation of mutuality between Christian existence and the church's liturgical life is a key to understanding the church's present liturgical turmoil. The present liturgical problems cannot be separated from the crisis in Christian existence which hinges on the difficulty modern Christians have perceiving the presence of God's



grace. When grace ceases to be a vivid and powerful factor in the awareness of Christian persons, both Christian existence and liturgical life soon begin to break down. Christian existence is a kind of self-conscious, responsible personhood which is formed out of a sense of radical responsibility and the radical presence and availability of God's grace.<sup>7</sup> But when grace is no longer perceived to be radically available, responsibility cannot be maintained and the whole structure crumbles. The radical demand of Jesus is, as John Cobb points out, an impossible demand precisely because it demands the acceptance of responsibility for those dimensions of human experience which are not under volitional control.<sup>8</sup> When this demand is given alone to human experience and is not given together with grace, it appears harsh, heteronomous, and inhumane. The only responses to a radicalized law without grace are rejection of the demand, reduction of the demand to more "manageable proportions," or a kind of intense frustration which might more accurately be called desperation. Therefore, when grace is lost and persons' sense of ultimate trust is undermined, Christian responsibility also deteriorates; and

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<sup>7</sup>Cobb, *The Structure of Christian Existence*, pp. 120-123. Also, see above, n. 2.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 119-121

eventually the whole structure of Christian existence collapses.<sup>9</sup>

Many of our modern liturgical difficulties are related to this kind of non-liturgical problem. Because grace seems remote or absent from the actual lives of persons, the liturgical expressions of grace seem alien, illusory, and irrelevant. To call people into question (for example, in a call to confession) on the basis of the demand of an absent God appears heteronomous and judgmental; and to promise the present availability of this remote God's grace (symbolized in sacramental communion) seems treacherous and deceptive. And even if the reactions are not this negative, liturgical forms are often seen merely as empty and meaningless-unrelated to anything in a modern person's actual experience. This is the heart of the liturgical crisis: at stake is not only the historical liturgical forms which appear anachronistic but also the classic shape of Christian life<sup>10</sup> which these forms have

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<sup>9</sup> See below, pp. 32-34.

<sup>10</sup> "Classic shape of Christian life" should not be thought of too specifically. What is meant is that general description of Christian existence outlined in Appendix A as self-conscious, self-transcendent selfhood ("spirit") characterized by radical responsibility and radical reliance on God's grace. See Cobb, *The Structure of Christian Existence*, pp. 119f.

for so long articulated. It is not only the language and style of the liturgy which is fundamentally problematic in our contemporary world but the fact that the liturgy articulates Christian existence--an existence of radical responsibility and radical reliance on God's grace.

The church, of course, has always had similar problems maintaining Christian existence in the lives of its members and making the liturgy relevant to everyday life. But in the modern world these normal problems have become critically intense. Therefore, we need to look at the kind of world in which the church is currently attempting to conduct its liturgical life before we consider more specifically the ways in which the contemporary problems of Christian existence are affecting Christian liturgy.

## II.

The modern world in the early 1970's is a complex place and generalizations about it are necessarily oversimplified and, thus, inaccurate to one degree or another. Nevertheless, it is important to orient ourselves in the modern world by asking: What is happening here? What is going on that must be taken into account by Christians? Perhaps the dominant feature of the modern world is still its secularity, its tendency toward the "desacralization" of *all* existence. There is, however, another feature of

the world of the 1970's of which Christians must take account. It is difficult to characterize very precisely, but it manifests itself variously in the popular pursuit of the occult, in the scientific investigation of paranormal experiences, in the practice of meditation (e.g., Yoga and Zen Buddhism), in sensitivity to bodily feeling, in "mind-expansion" and altered states of consciousness, and in the Christian charismatic movement. Clearly, this feature of our current situation is a challenge to the dominant secularity, although it remains to be seen whether these phenomena are the harbingers of a "new age" or only an interlude in the movement toward even more rigorous forms of secularity. But as Christians who live in the modern world, we must attempt to make some sense of it. There are, of course, many other aspects of contemporary culture which could also be considered for their impact on Christian existence and Christian liturgy. But these two are particularly important ones for our present discussion for two reasons. First, in a way they define the limits of the modern world. Extreme secularity tends to push toward the complete de-sacralization of all existence; ultimately, it implies the "death of God." The counter movement, on the other hand, points to another extreme possibility in its openness to the numinous and the paranormal within human experience. Second, these two features of the contemporary

world are important for our discussion because they both focus on human experience--a dominant theme throughout these pages. Both secularity and the counter-secular phenomena push the Christian to consider what is real and valuable in his experience. Let us now consider each of these two features of the modern world and examine their implications for Christian existence and Christian liturgy.

Secularization<sup>11</sup> is often used to describe a sociological process in which the influence, power, or control of portions of general cultural life by religious institu-

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<sup>11</sup>One often finds theological writers who make distinctions among "secular," "secularization," "secularity," and "secularism." The usual distinction is to posit that persons may have a real appreciation for the world and some degree of "autonomy" toward it (see below, p. 21) without developing a self-understanding and worldview which are completely devoid of transcendent reference or of sense of God's presence. When this distinction is made, the former part is usually called "secularity," while the latter is called "secularism." Examples of this distinction in recent liturgical writings are: Paul W. Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), pp. 158-160, 252f. and James F. White, *The Worldliness of Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967). The instability of this distinction has not always been recognized, and in some ways it seems more of an apologetic by Christians who are trying to find some ground on which Christian faith can stand--some way for Christianity to be a modern faith without losing the heart of Christian existence. For critiques of this distinction, see: Langdon Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), p. 32, n. 1, and Paul M. van Buren, "The Tendency of Our Age and the Reconception of Worship," *Studia Liturgica*, VII (1970), 3.

tions is reduced and restricted.<sup>12</sup> This sociological process has been steadily progressing in Western culture for several hundred years, and it has undoubtedly been influential. But there is another dimension to secularization which is more inward and subjective. It involves the creation of a secular mood or "spirit" or self-understanding--that is, a "secularization of consciousness."<sup>13</sup> It is this aspect of secularization which is most important for understanding the impact of the secular world on Christian existence.

Langdon Gilkey analyzes the secular mood, spirit, or worldview into four elements.<sup>14</sup> The first element is contingency--the belief that the world is the result of causes which are not rational, purposive, or necessary.<sup>15</sup> For secular persons, the totality of the "natural world" is a chance occurrence; the world and human existence itself are cosmic accidents. They do not exist for any purpose,

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<sup>12</sup>Larry Shiner, "Toward a Theology of Secularization," *Journal of Religion*, XLV (October 1965), 284.

<sup>13</sup>Peter L. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969), p. 4.

<sup>14</sup>Gilkey, pp. 40-61. Van Buren characterizes secularity a bit differently in terms of five "broad cultural shifts": from permanence to change, from the universal to the particular, from unity to plurality, from the absolute to the relative, and from passivity to activity. Van Buren, pp. 4-5.

<sup>15</sup>Gilkey, p. 40.

nor is their existence inherently meaningful or valuable. Nor is there any longer the possibility of arguing from contingency to a necessary transcendent, non-contingent order on which the contingent world rests.<sup>16</sup> The result is that the only intelligible categories for secular persons are those which are immediately given in conscious, rational experience.<sup>17</sup> Relativity is the second element of the secular spirit. Gilkey asserts that relativity is the result of the historical consciousness which developed in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>18</sup> For secular persons, nothing can be absolute because everything is conditioned by its historical context. No idea, value, doctrine, experience, life-style, or social organization can be considered absolute--a standard by which others are judged. Everything is produced by historical and/or natural causes and can only be understood in these terms. To

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>17</sup>The problem Gilkey finds with this is that the totality of the world is exhaustively given in the immediacy of conscious experience. Within such experience, nothing except, perhaps, man's subjectivity itself has meaning or purpose. Man's world is simply "there"--bleak and indifferent. As Gilkey says, "To restrict thought to the sensible manifold of immediacy, to what can be verified or falsified in particular concrete experiences, and to what constitutes our ordinary uses of language, is to be unable to think about these general structures of experience which are there as the universal form of all experience and all language." Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

assert that some finite event or experience or value is somehow also an embodiment of some ultimate or absolute dimension is simply unintelligible.<sup>19</sup> The third part of the secular spirit Gilkey calls temporality or transience. This is the radical perception that *everything* changes. Not only is this an acknowledgment that change occurs but that nothing is stable or secure, that nothing undergirds or directs the change, and that change does not point beyond itself to any goal or to any kind of stability whatsoever.<sup>20</sup> Temporality is the brutal fact that nothing endures, that no purposes, values underly and direct change, and that change does not point to some wider stability. Finally, autonomy is characteristic of modern secularity. Gilkey thinks that autonomy is the source of whatever optimism and courage there is in the modern spirit.<sup>21</sup> Man is "on his own" and whatever meaning and hope he may have must come from himself. No values are imposed; no meaning is inherent: man is not only the measure of meaning and value, he is their creator. If man does not decide and create meaning and value, they simply do not exist. Secular man is autonomous, and out of his own freedom alone he can

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 57.



". . . know his own truth, . . . decide about his own existence, . . . create his own meaning, and . . . establish his own values."<sup>22</sup> Taken together, contingency, relativity, temporality, and autonomy characterize the secular mood of modern persons. They suggest that not only the institutions of Western culture have been secularized but that the self-understanding, the consciousness, of modern persons also is secular.

The rise of this secular mentality has been clearly reflected in the development of modern philosophy. In a little book, *Is It Too Late?*,<sup>23</sup> John Cobb reviews the history of modern philosophy and arrives at what he calls the "dominant philosophy" by which he seems to mean the cumulative philosophical impact of Kantianism, phenomenology, existentialism, and (to a lesser degree) Hume and the British empirical tradition.<sup>24</sup> The cumulative impact of these philosophical positions is the restriction of "the real" to human experience<sup>25</sup> and the restriction of appropriate data from sense experience.<sup>26</sup> Cobb's point is that, although

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>23</sup>See above, n. 4.

<sup>24</sup>Cobb, *Is It Too Late?*, pp. 92-104.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 95, 129.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 102, 104.

the philosophy of the "man in the street" is still naively realistic, the dominant philosophy has "filtered down" to a majority of persons in a form which determines the value of something *only* in terms of its value for man. Even if something is considered real, it is valuable only if it directly and obviously contributes to mankind's benefit.<sup>27</sup> This is the philosophical equivalent of Gilkey's understanding of secular man's autonomy,<sup>28</sup> and it is emphasized also by Bultmann who says that, in secularization, man's reason becomes the determiner of all value:

. . . today autonomy is unfortunately spoken of as a self-legislation of the individual that understands itself to be free of obligations which transcend the individual level, and that determines value and valuelessness of itself.<sup>29</sup>

Hence, the totality of man's world becomes seen as "mere object," as lying completely open to man's planning, manipulation, and control--control by the values which man himself establishes.<sup>30</sup> The world in which secular persons live is devoid of any other subjects. And for more philosophically sophisticated persons not only value but *reality itself* is restricted to the immediacy of rational, conscious

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 34-37, 99-100.

<sup>28</sup>See above, p. 21.

<sup>29</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, "The Idea of God and Modern Man," in *The New Christianity*, (New York: Dell, 1967), p. 253. See also Shiner, p. 285.

<sup>30</sup>Cobb, *Is It Too Late?*, p. 99.

experience. Though philosophy seems esoteric and trivial to most secular persons, its impact in shaping our existence, if indirect, is nevertheless pervasive.<sup>31</sup> When all that a person can admit as valuable or real must be given in sense experience, Christian existence (if that is understood necessarily to include the availability of God's grace) is automatically excluded. There is simply no place in the worldview of the "dominant philosophy" for God.<sup>32</sup> When the only valid forms of knowing or expressing meaning are those we can "directly experience, manipulate, test, and verify," all other forms (poetry, imagination, religious vision, or philosophical speculation) are seen only to tell us about our psychological and verbal problems.<sup>33</sup> The totality of our world is reduced to

. . . the profane, contingent, blind causes which have produced us, the relative social institutions in which we live, the things and artifacts which we make, and our relations to one another; any other "sacred" realm of existence partakes for our age more of fantasy than it does of deity.<sup>34</sup>

Gilkey's description of the "four elements" of the

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<sup>31</sup>Cobb, *Is It Too Late?*, p. 99.

<sup>32</sup>"The major reason for the decline of belief in God in the modern world is that this belief has seemed increasingly out of step with the rest of modern thought. . . The basic problem was that it [belief in God] could not be successfully modified to fit the vision of reality expressed in the dominant philosophy." Ibid., 129.

<sup>33</sup>Gilkey, p. 38.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

secular mentality and Cobb's analysis of the "dominant philosophy" are at least suggestive of the character of human existence in the modern secular world. (As we have noted above, this is not the only important self-understanding in the modern world, but it is still the dominant one.) From the perspective of Christian existence, the existential impact of this secularity is largely negative. As secular persons, we live alone in a world which is contingent, without either purpose or intrinsic value, which is historically relative, and which is so transient that whatever meaning or significance there may be for us cannot be expected to endure. It is a world from which God has vanished--both as an object of human experience and as a category of thought. The cumulative impact of the secularization of consciousness and of the dominant philosophy is a powerful polemic against any structure of existence which is firmly dependent on God's grace. If the world is merely contingent and without purpose, if the only values which do make sense to us are the ones we establish, and if we can only know what comes through our conscious sense experience, there is clearly no place for God in our view of the world. He can not be seen, heard, or touched, and no "natural event" can be understood to reveal him since all natural events are to be explained scientifically and historically in terms of the relative flux of publicly observable

phenomena. Nor can we come into relationship with God by participation in some purpose or cause or ideal or value since, without man, these simply do not exist. And finally, it is not at all realistic to think that we may find some way to modify our understanding of God so that he can be made to fit into our secular worldview. If God has meant anything in Christian existence, he has meant that there are purposes and meanings in the world which are not exclusively dependent on man and that human existence is fulfilled by its participation in these purposes. It seems to me naive to think that this understanding could successfully be modified in such a way that it would be acceptable to the secular mentality.<sup>35</sup>

### III.

The point of all this is that, for secular persons, God seems remote. And this is about as true for Christians as it is for others. That many Christians in the modern world do not clearly perceive the presence of God and his grace can hardly any longer be doubted. For a long time, it was possible and convenient to ignore the problem of this remoteness; but, because grace is foundational to vital Christian living,<sup>36</sup> the problem's clear emergence

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<sup>35</sup>Cobb, *Is It Too Late?*, p. 129.

<sup>36</sup>See above, n. 2; also Appendix A.

within the Christian community was inevitable. And such a clear emergence has finally occurred in the appearance of the widely publicized "radical theologies"<sup>37</sup> of the last decade. The degree to which these theologies are unable to articulate an understanding or experience of God's grace is revealed in their central motif--the "death of God."

William Hamilton writes:

I am not referring to a belief in the nonexistence of God. I am talking about a growing sense, in both non-Christians and Christians, that God has withdrawn, that he is absent, even that he is somehow dead. Elijah taunted the false prophets and suggested that their god may have gone on a journey, since he could not be made to respond to their prayers. Now, many seem to be standing with the false prophets, wondering if the true God has not withdrawn himself from his people. This feeling ranges from a sturdy unbelieving confidence in God's demise to the troubled believer's cry that he is no longer in a place where we can call upon him.<sup>38</sup>

Now, it is not only humanity's idols which are absent or without sacred power in the modern world and not only man's misconceptions about God. It is also the God who is identified by the best of our traditional images--that "God described by the best and most sophisticated theologians of our time."<sup>39</sup> It is the God and father of our Lord Jesus

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<sup>37</sup>By "radical theologies," I mean the "death of God" theologies of the mid- and late 1960's as represented in the work of William Hamilton, Thomas Altizer, and Paul van Buren.

<sup>38</sup>William Hamilton, "The New Essence of Christianity," in *Toward a New Christianity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), pp. 271-272.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 273.

Christ himself who seems to have withdrawn and left us without his grace.

Despite the great diversity among the various radical theologies, they agree in this conviction: that God is not present to and for modern persons in the ways that people of past ages believed him to be. For the radical theologians, the only honest stance is to admit this much and begin from there. Thus, the radical theologies refuse to re-interpret the traditional notions of God so that modern people can continue to believe. This is a particularly important development within the Christian community because it "faces up" to the actual spiritual situation in the lives of many persons inside (as well as outside) the churches.<sup>40</sup> It is better to admit that God seems remote (if not non-existent) to us than to live with illusions and inadequate images. This stance is also important because it focuses theological attention on the crucial and decisive issue of contemporary Christian existence--the meaning and reality of God and his availability to human existence.<sup>41</sup> The radical theologies force us to acknowledge the depth of the crisis of Christian belief in the modern world. No longer can we pretend that all is well.

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<sup>40</sup>Gilkey, p. 110.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

With the coming of the radical theologies, it is no longer possible to look at the present crisis in terms of some dichotomy between the church and the world. No longer is it possible to see the world as a realm of unbelief and unfaith and to see the church as a bastion of faith and faithfulness for the protection of the gospel. Because the radical theologies are written by men who still claim to be Christians, these theologies are an acknowledgment that inability to believe is presently the experience of those *within* the church as it is of those who disclaim any relation to Christian faith. But not only have the radical theologies recognized this as the spiritual condition of the modern world, they have also seen that past certainties cannot be recovered simply by doing better or doing again what has been done in the past--that is, by reiterating traditional answers. As John Cobb has written:

. . . nor can this absence of belief be remedied by the mere proclamation that God has acted for man's salvation in Jesus Christ. Such proclamation is meaningless to many because the name "god" is only an empty sound.<sup>42</sup>

This reveals the dilemma of the modern Christian--which the radical theologies have accurately identified. It is not adequate simply to reaffirm the convictions of the past or even to begin with traditional affirmations since such

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<sup>42</sup>John Cobb, "Christian Natural Theology and Christian Existence," *Christian Century*, LXXXII (March 3, 1965), 265.



affirmations are unintelligible to the secular mentality. But if one begins with the secular mentality, then it seems impossible ever to arrive at anything remotely resembling that to which the traditional affirmations pointed. The traditional form of past certainties immediately discounts them, and the modern mentality (in its contingency, relativity, temporality, and autonomy) allows no categories into which these certainties could be adequately translated. The radical theologies have understood this dilemma to mean that it is no longer intelligible even to speak of God and that, for us, he is dead. Clearly they have chosen the second "horn" of the dilemma and have accepted the

. . . restriction of theological statements to what I can actually believe and accept myself, and so to what makes sense in my cultural context, whose principles I share in my thinking. This may be called, as it was in the Enlightenment, the principle of personal intellectual honesty. . .<sup>43</sup>

This is one of the most important contributions of the radical theologies: although secular erosion of Christian belief has been a gradual process, the results of this process must now be acknowledged and this must be the beginning point for reflecting and talking about Christian existence.

But as important as the radical theologies have been for clarifying the issues at stake in the secular world, they cannot themselves be the final answer. Despite

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<sup>43</sup>Gilkey, p. 114.

their important contributions, they do not help us understand how Christian existence is possible for persons in the modern world. This is especially true of those secular theologies which Larry Shiner classifies as "historical"<sup>44</sup>--that is, those theologies which understand secularization as an irreversible historical process<sup>45</sup> which has occurred externally in the institutions of Western culture and internally in the psychic lives of modern persons. They deny all possibility of any return to a sense of the sacred or to awareness of the presence of God in the world. The world of sacred power has been destroyed and is now lost to us forever. And because that world is gone, we must make our peace with the actual world in which we find ourselves--a world characterized by modern secularity.

The position of Paul van Buren illustrates this understanding of irreversible secularization. He asserts that we must no longer try to look beyond Jesus of Nazareth to find God; instead we (as modern, secular, persons) must fix our theological attention on Jesus himself, on his "contagious" freedom, and his ability to free other men.<sup>46</sup> At

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<sup>44</sup>Shiner, pp. 289-290.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Paul M. van Buren, "The Meaning of the Gospel," in *Toward a New Christianity*, pp. 286-287.

first, this seems to be a viable solution for secular persons who want to be Christians: since what can be known of God is revealed in Jesus and since the word "God" "equivocates and misleads,"<sup>47</sup> Christianity can do quite adequately with the man Jesus and dispense with the incomprehensible notion of "God." Van Buren comments on John 14:9-10 to make his point:

"Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?"

. . . The author [of the Gospel of John] asks us to stop "looking for the 'Father,'" for we shall not find him and the quest is beside the point in any case. Silence is the first and best answer to questions concerning the "Father." There are "many 'gods' and many 'lords'" [I Cor. 8:5-6] but for those for whom the freedom of Jesus is contagious, who have been so touched and claimed by him that he has become the criterion of their understanding of themselves, other men, and the world, there is but one "Lord": Jesus of Nazareth. Since there is no "Father" to be found apart from him, and since his "Father" can be found only in him, the New Testament (and this passage specifically) gives its answer to the question about "God" by pointing to the man Jesus. Whatever men were looking for in looking for "God" is to be found by finding Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>48</sup>

Here, van Buren, like the other radical theologians, forces us to confront our own secularity and face up to our inability to believe in God.

There are a number of problems with van Buren's

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 293.

position,<sup>49</sup> but the crucial one for the present discussion is whether Christian existence is possible in van Buren's secular understanding of the gospel. His discussion of the "freedom of Jesus" seems to be an apt description of the way Christian existence is experienced. It combines a sense of liberation, of a person's life becoming affirmed and creative and zestful, with concerned action for the liberation of others. While van Buren speaks of this liberation in terms of the "contagious" freedom of Jesus, it is not at all clear how the freedom of Jesus of Nazareth can have any impact on us today--at least not in a "secular understanding."<sup>50</sup> Van Buren seems to think that there is some correlation between the freedom of the actual man Jesus and the liberation of persons today, but it must be concluded that "contagion" is used metaphorically and that Jesus has no actual or literal impact on us at all or that

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<sup>49</sup>For example, problematic is van Buren's contention that God is known *only* in Jesus Christ. Cobb says, "The . . . criticism [of his process theism from the perspective of radical christology] I reject on the ground that the attempt to rest belief in God solely on Jesus Christ is, from the historical perspective, questionable and, from the perspective of systematic theology, illusory. Neither Jesus nor the early church held that the God of whom they spoke had been unknown in prior times." Cobb, "Christian Natural Theology . . . ," p. 265.

<sup>50</sup>The problems inherent in van Buren's use of "contagion" have been pointed out by others. For example, see Gilkey, pp. 126f., 127, n. 30.

some "agency" (for which van Buren does not adequately account) is still active. Van Buren's early position is illustrative of the difficulty inherent in speaking of Christian existence without some category like "grace." This difficulty is, however, understandable because grace is foundational to Christian existence.<sup>51</sup> The kind of freedom which Jesus and the early Christians enjoyed was a freedom based squarely on their perceptions of God's presence to them.<sup>52</sup> Their existence was a kind of self-transcendent selfhood in which the seat of existence was located in "spirit" and was radically responsible for every aspect of the person's life. It is accurate to speak of this kind of responsibility as "radical" because it is extended throughout the totality of personal life and is not limited by the abilities of personal choice. Clearly, fulfillment of this kind of responsibility is "impossible" if it is given alone; and when it is perceived alone, it results in a kind of

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<sup>51</sup>The role of grace in Christian existence is outlined in Appendix A of this paper. For a fuller exposition, see chapters ten and eleven of Cobb, *The Structure of Christian Existence*.

<sup>52</sup>See: Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), pp. 76-77, 108-109. C.H. Dodd, *The Founder of Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 56, 76-77. Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934, 1958), pp. 35f., 133f. George E. Ladd, "The Kingdom of God--Reign or Realm?" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXXI (September 1962), 232-235, 237.

desperation or in a reduction of the responsibility to more manageable proportions. Radical Christian responsibility is possible only when it is supported and energized by an equally strong sense of the presence of and reliance on God's grace. Jesus could be as free as he was because of his perception of the powerful presence of God.<sup>53</sup> Van Buren grasps this dual structure--one's own experience of freedom and one's concern and action for the liberation of others. And van Buren seems also to understand that this kind of life is impossible unless something happens "to us." But because he is unwilling to speak of God, he can not find a coherent category to describe how Christian existence becomes possible. The great service of van Buren and the other radical theologians is their clarification of the central issue of contemporary Christian existence--our sense of the remoteness of God and his grace. And we can no longer avoid this. But it is not a service to imply that Christian existence can easily continue without God. It would, perhaps, be more honest to say that, if some new and invigorating experience of God's presence does not emerge, Christian existence may soon be altogether impossible.

Thus, it seems that the radical theologies finally

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<sup>53</sup>See references in note 52.

have clarified for us a terrible choice--a choice between admitting our secular lack of faith and, thereby, leaving Christianity behind us (on the one hand) and (on the other) attempting to live in the past, in a world in which God was still alive and active. John Cobb clearly outlines our dilemma:

We seem to be confronted finally by only two choices. We may really take the modern world seriously, acknowledge that it is the only world we know, accept it, affirm it, and live it. To do so is to accept and live the death of God. On the other hand, we may refuse the modern world, distance ourselves from it, fence in our world of traditional faith, and seek to preserve it from the corrosion of the world outside. Both expedients are desperate ones.<sup>54</sup>

#### IV.

This discussion of secularization and radical theology is important for our total discussion because secularity is a dominant feature of the world in which the liturgical life of the church must now be lived. Moreover, the spiritual crisis posed by the secular world is most clearly, painfully, and urgently felt by the church when it gathers for corporate worship. It is much easier to overlook the discrepancies between the Christian and secular visions in other areas of church life than it is in the liturgy. One may study church history or even the New

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<sup>54</sup>John Cobb, "From Crisis Theology to the Post-Modern world," in *Toward a New Christianity*, p. 243.

Testament from a secular perspective and find there secular values; and many persons who are committed to social change choose to channel their efforts through religious institutions. But in the liturgy, the irreducible and incompatible differences emerge more clearly and in a way that makes it more difficult to "gloss over" or ignore them. In fact, Alexander Schmemmann<sup>55</sup> thinks that the real character of "secularism"<sup>56</sup> becomes clear precisely at this point. He defines secularism as "negation of worship."<sup>57</sup> Thus, he contends that (while the secular world may sometimes admit the existence of God) it denies God any effective presence *in the world*. The world of secularism is to be ". . . understood, experienced, and acted upon in its own immanent terms and for its own sake."<sup>58</sup> For Schmemmann himself, the entire world is thoroughly "sacramental"; that is, the world manifests the presence of God *in* itself. And in the liturgy, the church perceives, expresses, affirms, and celebrates this sacramentality of the world. In the words

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<sup>55</sup>Alexander Schmemmann, "Worship in a Secular Age," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, XVI (1972).

<sup>56</sup>Because Schmemmann consistently uses "secularism," I have used it here despite the normal use of "secularity" in other parts of this paper.

<sup>57</sup>Schmemmann, p. 4.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8.



of the New Testament, Christ is "known in the breaking of the bread."<sup>59</sup> But for secularism, bread is always merely bread--a conglomerate of organic molecules processed for human palatability; and it can never become a manifestation of God. Thus, the spiritual crisis posed for Christian existence by secularity emerges most clearly in the church's liturgy. Here, the contradictions are most clear: the liturgy points up the presence and activity of God in the world for persons who deny that a piece of bread or any other worldly object could ever be a manifestation of some transcendent or divine dimension of reality. The liturgy calls us to acknowledge, acclaim, and celebrate a sacramental vision of life and reality alien to the vision by which the vast majority of our experience is understood. What is at issue here is not only the incidental detail (the specific symbolic motifs) of the liturgy but its basic meaning--the shape of Christian life itself. While we may ignore this contradiction most of the time, in the liturgy such ignorance is much more difficult to maintain.

Only recently have those involved in practically structuring (or even theologically thinking about) the church's liturgical life recognized the full extent to which the secular world comes into conflict with Christian

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<sup>59</sup>Luke 24:35

liturgy. The last decade has seen an astounding amount of thought and energy poured into "liturgical renewal"--contemporizing liturgical language, removing the more offensive motifs and symbols, adding jazz or "folk" or rock music, creating a mood of festivity (rather than one of sobriety), and finding ways for the congregation to participate more fully. One has only to attend a Roman mass today or to read through some contemporary liturgical texts<sup>60</sup> to discover how much the liturgical life of the church has changed during our lifetime--not to mention the last fifteen years. But all of this effort and all of this change have not solved the fundamental problems--have not made the liturgy a viable way to celebrate a vigorous Christian existence in the modern world.<sup>61</sup> Nor has liturgical theology been very much more helpful. Books have been written to say that Christian liturgy is valid only when it enhances and strengthens persons' lives in the world and only when actual life in the world is incorporated into the liturgy; and essays claim that one can be truly worldly, truly secular, only as one celebrates his secular existence in

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<sup>60</sup>For example, the texts in *Word and Action* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969). An even more radical example is the Free Church of Berkeley's *The Covenant of Peace: A Liberation Prayer Book* (New York: Morehouse-Barlow, 1971).

<sup>61</sup>Charles Davis, "Ghetto or Desert: Liturgy in a Cultural Dilemma," *Studia Liturgica*, VII (1970), 10, 11, 14.

Christian liturgy.<sup>62</sup> All of these efforts, both liturgical and theological, have not been a total waste of time and energy; much of value has been contributed to the life of the church by them. But they have seldom recognized<sup>63</sup> the full proportions of the liturgical crisis which confronts the church today: the fact that the secular world calls into question the very heart and meaning of the liturgy and not only the unintelligibility of its more archaic elements. Charles Davis states the extremity of the situation:

The last few decades have been a time of liturgical reform. In the different churches traditional forms of worship have undergone many changes in order to adapt them to men as they are today . . . without success. The general verdict upon liturgical reform is that it has failed to solve the problem of worship in a secular age. The verdict is not simply that the job has not yet been completed, so that we could confidently expect that further changes would do the trick. No, the sense of failure is deeper. The conviction is

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<sup>62</sup>For example, White, *The Worldliness of Worship*. Actually, this has become a dominant theme in recent liturgical theology and is found in one form or another in most statements on the church's liturgical life and in most contemporary liturgical texts.

<sup>63</sup>One recognition of the full extent of the crisis occurred at the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Uppsala, Sweden in 1968. This Assembly appointed its Commission on Faith and Order to study the problem of worship in a secular world. A consultation took place, then, in Geneva in September, 1969. Several papers presented to the consultation appeared in *Studia Liturgica*, VII: 2-3 (1970) and a subsequent report in VII: 4 (1970) of the same journal. Also, a summary of the papers by John C. Kirby appeared in *Worship*, XLV (August-September 1971), 378-383.

growing that the chief effect of the reforms has been to uncover an insoluble problem.<sup>64</sup>

A Christian believer places himself outside the modern world in a state of spiritual deviancy from his contemporaries. There is no modern way of being a Christian, precisely because the modern world is not Christian. Likewise the problem of worship is not that of finding modern forms of worship to replace outdated forms. It is that worship itself is outdated. There is no modern form of public worship because the modern world is secular. Unless we face this unflinchingly we shall continue to dodge the real problem and make things worse rather than better for faithful Christians by our dabbling in liturgical reform.<sup>65</sup>

Instead of forcing ourselves to "face this unflinchingly," we have hoped that the liturgy itself could be our "way out." By modernizing liturgical practice, we have hoped to make the church's liturgy attractive to secular persons (and "secular persons," of course, means *all* of us to one degree or another). We have hoped that, by participation in the liturgy, secular persons would become open to one of the liturgy's primary functions: to help persons enter into experiences which they have not personally enjoyed themselves--specifically, those experiences which clearly embody the paradigms of all Christian experience.<sup>66</sup> Liturgy, like art, broadens and enriches our experience and, thus, helps us to avoid the grosser failures of narrowness

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<sup>64</sup>Davis, p. 10. Davis paper is part of the consultation noted above in n. 63.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>66</sup>For a somewhat fuller exposition of "paradigmatic experiences," see below, chapter three, pp. 105f.

of perspective and parochialism. And we have hoped that the liturgy would similarly enable us to enter into the lives and experience of persons for whom God's grace was a vivid and powerfully existential factor. The graceful rhythms of Christian existence, embodied in Jesus' last supper and resurrection meals and articulated in the eucharistic action--rhythms of the experience of failure and forgiveness, of demand and help to fulfill the demand, of being ultimately loved and loving others--are present in the liturgy and enable us to perceive the dynamics of that structure of existence. But it is increasingly difficult for secular persons to correlate those dynamics with their own subjective experience in the secular world. Liturgy and art *can* enable us to enter into experiences which we have not ourselves enjoyed. But for this to be effective and significant for us, the experience whose dynamics the liturgy or art work articulates must be plausible and intelligible within our own worldview. If the articulated experience has no point of contact with our own experience, we are likely to dismiss the experience as perhaps entertaining but trivial. Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* is significant for secular persons because "witch hunts" are a frightening part of modern experience. If, however, the content of the drama had been witchcraft (rather than witch hunting), it is unlikely that thoroughly secular persons

would have thought it important.<sup>67</sup> A portrayal of witch hunting can be assimilated into a secular worldview; but a serious statement about witchcraft would seem to secular persons an anachronistic way of understanding serious psychological disorders. The situation of the liturgy in the secular world is similar. If the liturgy were simply (or mainly) an articulation of the dynamics of human ethical struggles or of friendship or of the unfair execution of a great man, many secular persons would find it significant. But the articulation of the dynamics of the experience of God's grace must seem an anachronistic (and therefore trivial) way to understand human existence. For the liturgy actually to strengthen and enhance Christian existence, it must clarify, illuminate, and make sense of the concrete lives of persons. And in the secular world, this is immensely difficult to do.

Although secularity poses difficulties for Christian liturgy, it is, nevertheless, a dominant feature of the cultural context. And it is in this dominantly secular context that Christian liturgy must now be celebrated if it is to be celebrated at all. As this secularity has evoked radical proposals regarding Christian existence, there have

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<sup>67</sup>This is not to claim that large numbers of persons today are not deeply interested in witchcraft. But such interest is more a "counter-secular" phenomena than it is an expression of secularity. See below, pp. 47f.

also been radical liturgical proposals--proposals that attempt to "make sense" of some sort of Christian liturgy in a secular world. For example, Paul van Buren writes:

We make our task more difficult than it is already if we freeze our question in terms set by the older consciousness. If worship is defined as a response to transcendence, we are "stacking the deck" against ourselves . . . .

. . . If one thinks of worship as a human activity, then perhaps we can say it is a complex activity of repetition, celebration, reflection, enlightenment and rededication. None of these terms appears on the face of it nonsensical within the framework of secularity . . . . Telling and retelling the ancient story of the proclamation of a certain sort of "kingdom" of justice and mercy has always been a central part of Christian worship and presumably will continue to be central.<sup>68</sup>

But as we have noted before,<sup>69</sup> proclamation of the kingdom, if it is to be a Christian proclamation, is necessarily a proclamation of the reign of God. The energizing feature of Jesus' perception of a "kingdom of justice and mercy" was that it was God's kingdom.<sup>70</sup> Neither the kingdom itself (as some future sociological condition<sup>71</sup>) nor the human desire for such a kingdom was sufficient to mobilize human energy, but the power of God available to man because of

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<sup>68</sup>Van Buren, "The Tendency of Our Age . . . ," p. 9.

<sup>69</sup>See above, pp. 33f.

<sup>70</sup>The references noted in n. 52 above, are again relevant here.

<sup>71</sup>Jesus, of course, did not himself think of the kingdom as a sociological condition. For him, the kingdom was God's present and future reign. See Ladd, "The Kingdom of God--Reign or Realm?"

God's nearness. To proclaim such a kingdom apart from God's grace is unrealistic at best, and at worst it is dehumanizing because it imposes a standard of perfection which is humanistically impossible.<sup>72</sup>

A more honest and realistic portrayal of our actual liturgical alternatives is Charles Davis' "ghetto" and "desert."<sup>73</sup> The ghetto is his way of describing the attempt to preserve the liturgy against the impact of the secular world. To do so entails also, according to Davis,

. . . the formation of a counter-community strong enough to be a cultural enclave resistant to secularism, close and exclusive enough to create a sufficient network of relations for cultural purposes--a counter community with its own knowledge, language, symbols, attitudes, and emotional responses.<sup>74</sup>

To preserve Christian liturgy means that we must as completely as possible separate ourselves from the secular world and create a Christian ghetto in which to preserve a Christian culture. The only other alternative is what Davis calls the "desert"--the life of the Christian *in* the secular world. For "desert Christians," Davis thinks that the Liturgy of the Word is the only dominant and regular form of liturgical life possible. "Conversation, discus-

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<sup>72</sup>Note Cobb's critique of humanism in his *Is It Too Late?*, pp. 117-119.

<sup>73</sup>Davis, pp. 19-26.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 19.



sion, silence, reading, singing, group action or common prayer"<sup>75</sup> are real possibilities, but what we have known as the Liturgy of the Sacrament, the eucharist, can not be a fully viable form because it requires a rather massive and congenial culture for its regular practice, growth, and vitality. "Desert Christians" have only "personal" or individual faith, but the classic sacraments of the church require a much higher degree of commonality among the faiths of individuals than is possible in the secular world. Patterns of "celebration" may emerge, but these will not have the weight, power, significance, or universality which has been characteristic of the eucharist. The choice between the ghetto and the desert is reminiscent of the choice which John Cobb said was ours regarding Christian existence generally;<sup>76</sup> and here also, both choices are "desperate" ones. Neither is the option we would choose if there were another alternative. Neither withdrawing into some kind of protective Christian enclave nor living in a totally alien culture is very attractive; and neither is likely to provide the cultural resources which are necessary for liturgical creativity.

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>76</sup>Cobb, "From Crisis Theology . . . ," p. 243. See above, p. 35.

## V.

Although secularity is still perhaps the dominant *zeitgeist* of the modern world, events in the last few years have indicated the presence of a diverse but strong "counter-secular" movement. (And, perhaps, it is among the weird phenomena of this "movement" that we may find some clues about a "third alternative" by which we could avoid the desperate choice posed by Cobb and Davis.) I became aware of this "movement" while I was an undergraduate in the late 1960's. At that time I was busily adjusting my pietistic background to the "hard secularity"<sup>77</sup> which seemed to characterize my future world. But my contemporaries were then already experimenting with "mind-expanding" drugs, "altered states of consciousness," meditative techniques from the East, and the clandestine rites of the occult. My contemporaries were making decisions on the basis of the divination of the *I Ching*, and they were seeking fulfillment in communal living and in intense sensory experience. Whatever else these contemporaries of mine were attempting, they were at least attempting to overcome the dominant secularity of the modern world and to envision a new world which would be different from the secular one.

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<sup>77</sup>This term is used by Gilkey (p. 70) to identify the secular vision of reality which most stringently restricts the limits of human experience and thought.

In *The Occult Revolution*,<sup>78</sup> Richard Woods documents the extent to which American "secular" culture is involved in such counter-secular phenomena as magic, sorcery, astrology, witchcraft, devil worship, numerology, palmistry, and prophecy. Woods is concerned that these phenomena and their pervasive presence in "secular" culture be taken seriously, and he understands the "occult revolution" to represent

. . . a religious response to the impact of technological change in the face of the failure of the churches to provide acceptable values for belief and commitment. The occult is not merely an affront to science and an attack on organized religion; it is a product of their default and a substitute for both.<sup>79</sup>

It would be simple to dismiss the "occult revolution" as a fad which will soon pass or as the "lunatic fringe" of a patently unstable younger generation. These are the simple reactions, but they are probably not the most constructive ones. Indeed, the current wide-spread dabbling in (or fanatic commitment to) the occult may represent a "lunatic fringe," but we should make sure that we have the fringe on the right carpet. The center of the carpet may not be youthful rebellion against established secularity as much as it is the careful, responsible, scientific exploration of the limits of human experience. Woods himself points out

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<sup>78</sup>Richard Woods, *The Occult Revolution* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971).

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11.

that, while for many persons "telepathic communication and clairvoyance, telekinesis and levitation" are still considered "occult," this is no longer a legitimate classification for them since recognized science has finally begun to accept them as matters of fact.<sup>80</sup> J.B. Rhine's work on extrasensory perception<sup>81</sup> is only the most famous example of the scientific community's admittedly reluctant admission of certain aspects of the "paranormal" into the realm of the scientifically verifiable. Both these scientific investigations and the popular "counter-secular" interests, however, make a common assertion: that human experience need not be limited in the ways that "hard secularity" has contended. Both Newtonian science<sup>82</sup> and the "dominant philosophy"<sup>83</sup> have asserted that man gains knowledge only from the physical world through sense perception. But this vision of reality seems now to be breaking down on so many

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-23.

<sup>81</sup>See, for example, J.B. Rhine, *New Frontiers of the Mind* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1937); J.B. Rhine, *The Reach of the Mind* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1947); J.B. Rhine, *New World of the Mind* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1953).

<sup>82</sup>See Richard H. Overman, *Evolution and the Christian Doctrine of Creation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), p. 168.

<sup>83</sup>See above, pp. 22f.

fronts that it is almost inevitable that in the near future most modern persons will understand human experience as deeper, wider, and richer than the psychological processing of sense data. An example of this is the fact that reports of paranormal experience have become almost commonplace; in fact, one almost has to live in cultural isolation (or in a Protestant seminary) not to encounter them.<sup>84</sup> Not too long ago, the report of a paranormal experience would have immediately qualified a person for a psychiatric examination; and even now such reports may seem a bit fantastic, though they seldom evoke the kind of blatant skepticism characteristic of our not too distant past. But we must remember that this is not just some "lunatic fringe" phenomenon; rigorous empirical procedures have verified quite a number of experiences only recently considered impossible. Moreover, many of these experiences are being publicized in scientific journals which are dedicated exclusively to the

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<sup>84</sup>For example, Clyde Reid, *21st Century Man--Emerging* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1971), pp. 89-91. An interesting feature of Reid's report is that while the experience may seem unusual and perhaps somewhat weird, he is not at all incredulous. But most important, Reid seems to think of the future as a time increasingly characterized by paranormal experience: "Increasingly there seems to be evidence that the spirit of man is not tied to his physical body, and the weight of data is extremely difficult to dismiss, even if we prefer not to believe a particular story . . . . We seem to be entering a period of more openness to the possibilities of extrasensory perception, psychic phenomena, and the existence of life beyond." pp. 89-90.

study of these phenomena. One such journal, the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, is

concerned with the publication of theoretical and applied research, original contributions, *empirical* papers, articles and studies in meta-needs, ultimate values, unitive consciousness, peak experiences, ecstasy, mystical experience, B values, essence, bliss, awe, wonder, self-actualization, ultimate meaning, transcendence of the self, spirit, sacralization of everyday life, oneness, cosmic awareness, cosmic play, individual and species-wide synergy, maximal interpersonal encounter, transcendental phenomena, maximal sensory awareness, responsiveness and expression, and related concepts, experiences, and activities. As a statement of purpose, this formulation is to be understood as subject to *optional* individual and group interpretations, either wholly or in part, with regard to the acceptance of its contents as essentially naturalistic, theistic, supernaturalistic, or any other designated classification.<sup>85</sup>

The amusing character of this "Statement of Purpose" is obvious; but what may not be so obvious is that this journal is in the business of publishing "hard data" on practically any paranormal experience.

The point of this discussion is not that any of these phenomena, despite the religious quality of many of them, obviously or simply verifies the Christian gospel. They do not. But they do suggest a world which cannot be exhaustively described in the terms of the "dominant philosophy" or the secular self-understanding as Gilkey has defined it. And they do extend the limits of human exper-

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<sup>85</sup>"Statement of Purpose," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, II (1970), i.

ience much beyond anything that establishment Protestant theology has recently imagined.<sup>86</sup> The inchoate character and lack of precision evident in the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*'s statement of purpose discloses the primitiveness of our scientific knowledge about human experience. And this very primitiveness should make us reluctant arbitrarily to limit our consideration of human experience to any set of preconceived categories. And the counter-secular movements, both scientific and popular, suggest the possibility that human experience can be expanded beyond the limits of secularity.

All of this seems to suggest that what may actually be occurring in our midst is the emergence of a new cultural *Geist*--spirit, mood, or vision of reality. If Clyde Reid is right and "21st century man" is to be characterized

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<sup>86</sup>There are, of course, notable exceptions to this. For example, a fine rationalist like Cobb has said, "Non-sensory experience occasionally manifests itself in striking fashion in what is called extrasensory perception . . . . The prejudice against accepting its reality has been great, but the evidence of its occurrence is greater still, and the time has come for us to try to understand it rather than simply to prove or disprove its existence." John Cobb, *God and the World* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 75-76. And in another place, he says that Whitehead's cosmology has ". . . removed all barriers of incredibility erected by the dominant modern mentality against direct influence of one person on another, even of a person in the distant past." Cobb, "Christian Natural Theology . . . ," p. 267. Even though Cobb can admit the possibility of paranormal phenomena, he rarely places much theological importance on them.

by an intensified openness to the full range of human experience,<sup>87</sup> the vision of reality which will result from this can only dramatically alter the secular self-understanding with which we have been living. It is presently impossible to discern what form this openness to the paranormal will take, but there is little reason to think that it will necessarily be a Christian one. Perhaps the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology's* "Statement of Purpose" clearly reflects the current lack of interpretive framework; it leaves open the question as to whether the phenomena are to be interpreted ". . . as essentially naturalistic, theistic, supernaturalistic or any other designated category."<sup>88</sup>

Since our culture has been isolated from such experience for so long, perhaps the easiest path to follow in becoming sensitive to the depths of our own experience is what John Cobb has called the "new paganism." He says that the new pagans are

. . . irreverent toward the traditional Christian and humanistic symbols of the sacred. They are not concerned with displaying the sacred as either unified or transcendent. They are satisfied in the immediacy of the experience of the sacred power. They call on us to regain the lost awareness of the sacred in all the varied experiences of life. Then we will stop treating these experiences as pragmatic means to some future or transcendent good and enjoy them as ends in

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<sup>87</sup>See above, n. 84.

<sup>88</sup>II (1970), p. i.



themselves. Not theories about the universe, but the concentration of energy and feeling in the now is the proper expression of this renewal of religious experience.<sup>89</sup>

The new paganism, Cobb says, attempts to recover much of what has been lost in secularity. It is sensitive to the rhythms of the natural world, the human body, and communal (actually, "tribal") intimacy, and it is content simply to enjoy the feeling of energy and vitality which comes from this sensitivity.

One good example of the "new paganism" is Bernard Gunther's *Sense Relaxation Below Your Mind* and *What To Do Till the Messiah Comes*.<sup>90</sup> Both of these books are manuals; they give step-by-step instructions for achieving intense experience of one's own body, communal togetherness, and the physical world. There is an aura of the sacred in Gunther's descriptions--a sense that the sacred permeates all our existence and that we can experience it. But the experiences, as Gunther describes them, never point beyond themselves. Experiences of the sacred are not understood as an encounter with any specifically transcendent dimension or any divine (or demonic) other. The ecstatic, intense, or paranormal experience is presented as an end in

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<sup>89</sup>Cobb, *Is It Too Late?*, 120-121.

<sup>90</sup>Bernard Gunther, *Sense Relaxation Below Your Mind* (New York: Collier, 1968); Bernard Gunther, *What To Do Till the Messiah Comes* (New York: Collier, 1971).

itself; it is simply enjoyed and celebrated. In these two books we can see an affirmation of expanded human experience in a form which is not specifically Christian. Here we see a "post-scientific" and "post-Christian"<sup>91</sup> kind of paganism; it is interested only in the immediate experience of the sacred--without either a scientific explanation of the experience or a Christian sense that the experience is an encounter with God.

Gunther's manuals also include some interesting liturgical elements. In *What To Do Till the Messiah Comes*, he includes instructions for the following exercises: "breaking of bread," "wine ceremony," "footwashing," "baptise your self," "communion serving," "marriage ceremony," "the laying on of hands," and "peace embrace."<sup>92</sup> Not only are these names similar to those of Christian liturgy, but the practices themselves are almost identical. But for all this similarity, the intent (and the articulated structure of existence) are different. Consider Gunther's description

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<sup>91</sup>That Gunther's work is "post-scientific" and "post-Christian" not only means that it comes after the rise of science and Christianity, but also that it takes account of them in some way. Even rejection of and reaction against science and Christianity is a way of taking account of them. Also, see below for the similarity of Gunther's exercises to Christian liturgical motifs.

<sup>92</sup>Gunther, *What To Do* . . . , no page number.

of "wine ceremony";

sit in a circle  
 with a bottle of wine  
 and a chalice  
 in the center  
 one member of the  
 group  
 slowly pours the wine  
 into the chalice  
 while the other[s] watch  
 its changing  
 shape color  
 listen hear its sounds  
 then the chalice  
 is passed around and  
 each member in turn  
 smells the wine  
 slowly touches  
 the wine to his lips  
 and then taste[s]  
 drinks a sip of the wine  
 it[']s divine<sup>93</sup>

Clearly, there is here an intensity of experience which  
 senses the presence of the sacred; but the immediate exper-  
 ience itself is the final goal. The exercise suggests the  
 Christian eucharist; but in this "wine ceremony" the wine  
 functions differently. The wine is simply wine; if one  
 experiences it deeply, one can sense the sacred beneath the  
 surface of the wine. But there is no sense that the wine  
 indicates the presence of God or recalls the paradigmatic  
 events of the Incarnation. Of course, we must not too  
 quickly dismiss the point of Gunther's exercise--the culti-  
 vation of rich, deep, intense experience for no other

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

purpose than the enjoyment and enrichment of our lives. Christians, as well as others, need the ability to enjoy their experiences without always making them *mean* something else. We miss much of the richness of life when none of our moments are savored in their specific, unique immediacy. For this reason, Gunther's exercises should be taken seriously. But in taking them seriously, we cannot afford to be altogether uncritical; nor can we fail to note that the human existence which Gunther encourages is *not* specifically Christian. To savor and enjoy our immediate experience is valuable to Christian as well as other forms of human existence. (And much of what we will have to say in the next chapter will affirm this value.) But there are dimensions of Christian experience which are not included in Gunther's exercises;<sup>94</sup> and completely neglecting those dimensions (as Gunther does) would eventually undermine Christian existence. The point here is that merely expanding human experience does not necessarily lead to a renewal of Christian existence. And it can lead to a form of the "new paganism" which rather self-consciously rejects much of what is decisive for Christian existence.

Thus, we must not assume that a cultural rejection of secularity will necessarily be an affirmation of post-

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<sup>94</sup>For example, the sense that experience of God's love leads to love of the neighbor.

secular Christianity. It could just as easily result in a "new paganism" or some other structure of existence. Nevertheless, the breakdown of secularity in the self-understanding of modern persons does open the *possibility* that a post-secular form of Christian existence could emerge as a vital alternative. We have seen that the denial of God's activity in the world and human experience is a specific way in which secularity undermines Christian existence. But a renewed openness to the wider ranges and deeper dimensions of human experience *could* break through the secular denials. And in that breakthrough, Christians could again sense that God is immediately present to them. Whether this will happen, we cannot say; but there are encouraging signs. In the next chapter, we will examine two of these signs--both of which are attempts to identify the presence of God in human experience.

## CHAPTER 2

### TOWARD RENEWAL OF CHRISTIAN EXISTENCE

To be a Christian in the modern world often feels like being, to use Peter Berger's image, a witch doctor among logical positivists.<sup>1</sup> But it is seldom that many of us can be detached enough from our existential condition to view it so humorously. More often the realization is a painful one--one that motivates us to hope that things may change in such a way that Christian life and celebration may be less alien to some kind of "post-secular" culture. This is a kind of hope about which John Cobb has written:

Perhaps even today at the point at which all rational structure and all human meaning seems to be evaporating, new structures and new meanings may be emerging.

If this is so, and I earnestly hope that it is so, then we may escape the desperate choice indicated above<sup>2</sup> between affirming the modern world and reacting against it defensively. We may refuse the modern world not by defending the past but in the name of a new world which *may* be born. We cannot of course know that it will be born. We cannot even know whether our decision for it may help it to be born. But we can affirm it, and in doing so we can repudiate the modern world

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<sup>1</sup>Peter L. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>See John B. Cobb, Jr., "From Crisis Theology to the Post-Modern World," in *Toward a New Christianity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), p. 243. See above, Chapter 1, p. 35.

in the name of the world we will to be the post-modern world.<sup>3</sup>

If such a new world should become an actuality for us, it would mean that new ways of discovering, clarifying, and maximizing God's grace had emerged concretely in our lives.

This seems to me also the best hope for a renewed and vital Christian liturgy. It has been contended above that the current state of liturgical affairs is not simply a *liturgical* crisis. Liturgical problems are only one dimension of a broader problem which is essentially focused in modern persons' inability to perceive or make sense of the presence of God's grace to and for them. Liturgical renewal is inextricably "bound up" with what we might call "Christian renewal"--the renewal of Christian existence or the development of a new mode of Christian existence. In the process of Christian renewal, liturgy is only one feature or aspect of the problem. Indeed, it can help facilitate the process of renewal, but the full renewal of liturgical life can only come as other aspects (e.g., experience and theology) are also renewed--and so, also, the totality of Christian existence as such. Only as the liturgy is renewed in the context of the renewal of other aspects of Christian existence can the program of liturgical renewal which has been launched in the churches be fulfilled.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

The goal of such renewal is discovering, clarifying, and maximizing God's grace in our personal and corporate lives. If this goal is to be reached, we must begin to be able in some way to identify the activity of God in our experience. In the modern world, God has begun to seem remote from persons and unavailable to them. This has placed Christians under intense pressure and posed for them the dilemma of being both Christian and modern. If this situation is to be overcome, the experience of Christian persons must once again contain moments in which God is perceived to be present and graciously available.

In the Spring of 1971, a convocation series was held at the School of Theology at Claremont. The theme for the series was "The Essence of Christianity." When it came John Cobb's opportunity to articulate his understanding of "the essence," he said simply, "The essence of Christianity is grace."<sup>4</sup> Although he went on to say what he meant by that word, he said that word was his answer. That word, "grace," is a common topic of conversation in theological circles. But it is often difficult to discover precisely what is meant by it. Even after lengthy discussions and explorations, after it has been contrasted with "law,"

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<sup>4</sup>John B. Cobb, Jr., "The Essence of Christianity" (unpublished lecture, Claremont, CA, April 27, 1971).



after one has been warned of Pelagianism, and after one has read (or, at least, heard of) Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Barth, it is not unusual to have some difficulty "coming to terms" with "grace." Part of the problem is that "grace" is most often presented as a notion, an idea, a belief, or a "fact." The bolder theologs may venture an analogy: "grace is like . . ." But hardly anyone (except the charismatic fringe--"Jesus freaks" and "pentecostals"), and this is the heart of the problem, is willing to risk identification of grace in concrete human experience. Persons are constantly assured that grace is "there," but few expect it to make any *discernible* impact on a person's concrete experience or any difference in his actual life in the world.

This is not at all mysterious. It is the natural outcome of the adjustment of Christian existence to the secular world. It is a survival technique--an attempt to maintain Christian existence by obscuring those features which are most blatantly in conflict with the vision of reality of the secular world. Grace is still asserted as "there," and it is assumed that it has some (indiscernible) influence on persons' lives; but it cannot be identified concretely because any concrete identification runs the risk of conflicting with secular, naturalistic explanations. And no theologian wants to fight those old battles

again. No one wants some future film to portray him as Stanley Kramer's 1960 film, *INHERIT THE WIND*, portrayed William Jennings Bryan--as a pompous, self-righteous, dogmatic reactionary. So grace is relegated to that ideal world of intellectual notions from which it can enter into theological essays but not into actual human experience.

This would not be problematic if grace were some peripheral theological issue. But since grace is foundational and constitutive of Christian existence--in the words of the convocation series, the "essence" of Christianity--it cannot be dealt with so cavalierly if Christian existence is to be renewed. Indeed some fresh way of perceiving and identifying the presence of God's grace must become possible.

But this is not to say that this theological response can just be dismissed as having "sold us out." Indeed, this response has been deeply (often painfully) aware of *the* crucial question: How can grace be identified in the experience of secular persons--persons who limit reality to the physical world and their own conscious experience, persons who judge all value in terms of its value for people, persons who limit knowledge to the data of sense experience, or persons who perceive themselves and their world as contingent, relative, transient, and

autonomous.<sup>5</sup> We are ungrateful if we do not admit our debt to all those persons who have continued to speak of grace in a secular world--even if the speech was occasionally only a mumble.

But the current depth of the crisis of Christian identity necessitates that we find fresh ways of identifying the presence of grace. We can no longer settle only for inferences; we can no longer be satisfied with adding up the sum of our existence (being careful to limit the addends to those features of our existence which fall under secularly admissible categories) and inferring from the sum that grace must have happened somewhere--though we cannot be sure just where. Such "inferential grace" is not trivial, and it may in fact convince persons that grace has occurred for them; but it cannot be the only or the dominant way grace is identified. By itself, it cannot supply the kind of energy necessary to establish and sustain Christian existence in the subjective flow of actual human experience. Some fresher and more direct identification must be made.

Peter Berger comes closer. He begins with human experience and there identifies what he calls "signals of

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<sup>5</sup>See above, Chapter 1, pp. 19-22.

transcendence"--order, play, hope, condemnation, and humor.<sup>6</sup> Let us consider just one of these. The signal of transcendence which Berger calls the "argument from ordering" relies on man's sense that the cosmos is orderly and dependable and can be trusted. He reminds us of a very common human experience:<sup>7</sup> a child, frightened, awakes in the middle of the night and cries out in terror; his mother comes to him, puts her arms around him, and says, "Everything's all right!" Now Berger asks, Is the mother lying? Of course, the question is not altogether serious in that form, and no *simple* yes/no answer to it is possible; but it, nevertheless, points up the fact that deep within ourselves is a perception of an ordered world which is trustworthy. In his deep night terror, the child has been confronted with chaos and has lost that sense of trust. The mother comes not only to comfort, according to Berger, but also to restore that sense of order and trust. Our universal judgment is that the mother's action is appropriate. Berger's point is that this action is appropriate not simply because it is the humane thing to do but because the

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<sup>6</sup>Berger, pp. 65f. It is assumed that Berger's program is ultimately an attempt to make belief in God plausible. Though he does not emphasize the specific category of "grace," his intention seems obviously similar to that of the argument being developed here.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 67-69.

mother's (and our) perception of order is *true*, that indeed there is such an order which corresponds to our perception of it. If the mother's and our perceptions were false, then it would be better to allow the child to experience the terror of ultimate chaos as completely as possible since that would be a way to help him adjust to the truth of his own human existence--and to do otherwise would be a lie. And if we are not to admit the perceptions to be false and the mother's action a lie, we must also admit the existence of some trustworthy, transcendent order.

There are problems with Berger's analysis--two of which will be noted below--but it is important to see the strengths. Perhaps the most important thing about Berger's analysis is that it does consider actual, concrete human experience and attempts to demonstrate that such experience does on occasion point beyond itself and beyond the naturalistic world to some kind of transcendence--that human experience implicitly contains within itself transcendent reference. Now, Berger is not unaware that this is often considered to be mere "projection." But neither is he particularly troubled by this awareness. To label some content of human experience a "projection" does not really settle the question of whether that "projection" is *true*. "To label a phenomenon a 'projection' is not to settle its ultimate status but to call for further investigation of

its remaining aspects which have yet to be considered."<sup>8</sup> Berger's point is that human experiences which implicitly contain transcendent reference appear as "projections" because one has limited himself to an empirical frame of reference. As Berger himself says:

In any empirical frame of reference, transcendence must appear as a projection of man. Therefore, if transcendence is to be spoken of as transcendence, the empirical frame of reference must be left behind. It cannot be otherwise. My concern is the method by which this switch in frames of reference is to be attained.<sup>9</sup>

To illustrate his meaning, Berger uses the experience of modern mathematicians and scientists. He calls mathematics a "pure projection of human consciousness"<sup>10</sup>--a consistent system of categories and relations which are projected without any consideration of their possibly describing the actual world. But the astounding fact is that modern science has found that these "pure projections" of mathematics surprisingly often do describe the natural world even though they were not projected for that purpose. One example of such discovery was the development of Reimannian curved-space geometry and the subsequent discovery that

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<sup>8</sup> Charles A. Corr, "Peter Berger's Angels and Philosophy of Religion," *Journal of Religion*, LII (October 1972), 428.

<sup>9</sup> Berger, p. 104.

<sup>10</sup> Berger, p. 58.

this geometry "fit" the descriptions of relativity theory.<sup>11</sup> "Put crudely, the mathematics that man projects out of his own consciousness somehow corresponds to a mathematical reality that is external to him, and which indeed his own consciousness appears to reflect."<sup>12</sup> Berger's implicit argument is that, if pure mathematical projections sometimes turn out to be true--that is, descriptive of an actual world external to man--it is not logical to assert a priori the implausibility of his intuitions of a transcendent order also being true. Signals of transcendence, therefore, cannot be dismissed only because they are "projections" of man's subjectivity. Projections they are, to be sure; but that does not finally answer the question of their truth or falsehood.

The central thrust of Berger's program is that human experience be taken more seriously and examined on its own terms. One of the crucial issues here (to which we shall return shortly) is the willingness--or unwillingness--of persons to consider a fuller range of human experience. Berger finds fault in the position of most Anglo-American philosophy which, he says, reduces human experience to that

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<sup>11</sup>Martin Gardner, *Relativity for the Million* (New York: Pocket Books, 1962), pp. 94-96.

<sup>12</sup>Berger, p. 58.

of a "slightly drowsy, middle-aged business man right after lunch."<sup>13</sup> This kind of restriction on the limits of human experience not only negates the possibility of its containing transcendent reference, it also implies an impoverishment in which the most interesting features of human life are relegated to triviality. Moreover, we are not the first people to find that everyday life is dominated by empirical, pragmatic, utilitarian imperatives geared to this world. But we are among the first to consider this an *exhaustive* description of human experience. Pre-modern persons, who were not dominated by secularity, assumed another world as a background to this one--another world which impinged on this one in a variety of ways.<sup>14</sup> Berger posits that our own existence contains traces, clues, and hints of this "other world,"<sup>15</sup> but we must be willing to consider our experience a bit more broadly if we are to see these traces as anything more than trivial epiphenomena.

Berger's method *begins* with human experience. He proposes an "anthropological"<sup>16</sup> starting point: theology

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-4.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid. Berger uses "anthropological" to refer to ". . . the philosophical enterprise that concerns itself with the question 'What is man?'"



must develop an "empirical sensitivity" that seeks to correlate its propositions with what can be empirically known.<sup>17</sup> Empirical analysis, of course, is not theologically exhaustive. The empirically given is the starting point from which one can move by "inductive faith" to assertion of transcendence.<sup>18</sup> Berger admits ". . . this transition from empirical analysis to metaphysics is in itself an act of faith"<sup>19</sup> because the reflective analysis of human experience does not disclose the transcendent itself but only the "signals of transcendence." But these signals have implicit in them an intentionality to point beyond themselves and beyond any naturalistic order. The "faith" required to assert transcendence is justified because it is the only way to take seriously this intentionality.<sup>20</sup> "The induction leads to faith when a religious interpretation is called upon to account for that which has been uncovered in the empirical analysis."<sup>21</sup> Thus, Berger's "jump" from the empirical to the transcendent is not a simple or a naive one. It is based on the discovery in

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 103-104.

<sup>20</sup>Corr, pp. 435-436.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 434.

human experience of factors which cannot adequately be accounted for by naturalistic explanations alone. Of course, this is not offered as an empirical "proof" of the transcendent. No such proof can be offered since naturalistic interpretation is always possible, but (for Berger) naturalistic explanations are not always equally plausible.<sup>22</sup>

Berger's program is a good beginning. It does take human experience seriously and attempts to identify in it the traces of transcendence. But perhaps the most important feature of it is its call for an appreciation of wider ranges of human experience. As one reviewer comments:

Perhaps the most significant consideration in Berger's work is the contribution he makes toward recapturing the richness of experience. All too much of recent philosophizing--and particularly its "empirical" forms--has had the effect of what Berger terms a "shrinkage in the scope of human experience."<sup>23</sup>

But this is both the strength and the weakness of Berger's analysis of human experience. He calls for a consideration of wider ranges of experience, and then he arbitrarily limits his consideration to normal, common, ordinary, universal experiences. He very consciously excludes "religious" experience from consideration, which may be a viable tactical choice but which in the long run may mean that

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 435-436.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 432. See also Berger, pp. 94, 120-121.

human experience does not *directly* disclose the transcendent. Charles Corr comments that *A Rumor of Angels* suffers from a serious tendency to reduce religion to theology, and this comment is accurate. Berger does *begin* with human experience, but the ability to assert the transcendent does not at all emerge directly out of that experience itself. It emerges only after a rather sophisticated analysis of that experience. The problem is that the power and energizing character of the experience are dissipated in the analysis and are not, therefore, available to sustain, enrich, and empower persons' concrete lives. A person may gain cognitive comfort from Berger's analysis, and the development of conviction may give life a kind of strength. But ultimately this cannot be a satisfactory program for the renewal of Christian existence. It lacks the clear and direct availability of the transcendent to the empirical which is implied in "grace." "Grace" implies that God is directly available to human persons to support and strengthen their actual lives in the world. Berger might not deny this, but his analysis finally has the effect of "intellectualizing" the reality of the transcendent.

The most serious problem in *A Rumor of Angels*, despite its attack on others for this same problem, is this arbitrary restriction of human experience. Perhaps Berger's own residual secularity is disclosed in this

limitation. This may be one of the great ironies of our time. Now that Christianity--both in thought and experience--has accommodated itself to the restrictive categories of recent secularity, the secular world is opening itself to those very categories of human experience which the church (and Berger) have given up. (He who marries the spirit of the age may soon find himself a widower!<sup>24</sup>) It would be ironic if it were the restrictions which Berger places on the experiences he is willing to analyze that put him most out of touch with the "growing edge" of the modern spirit! Though ironic, it could be true. We have already seen that, in the midst of our dominantly secular culture, there are emerging "counter-secular" phenomena and movements. And it may be that these adventures into the paranormal, the occult, and the esoteric are currently the "growing edge" of the modern spirit.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the common feature of these diverse phenomena is their rejection of the secular restriction of human experience. Gunther's "wine ceremony" implies an unwillingness to experience wine as *merely* a pleasant beverage. He rejects such limitation and calls persons to perceive the sacred below the wine's

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<sup>24</sup>Paraphrased from William Inge, *Untitled Epigram, Religious Humanism*, V (Winter 1970), front cover.

<sup>25</sup>See above, Chapter 1, pp. 46f.

bubbly surface.<sup>26</sup> And the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*<sup>27</sup> asserts (along with J.B. Rhine<sup>28</sup>) that science must use its tools to explore *all* the ranges of human experience--even those which seem impossible to the secular mentality. It would *indeed* be ironic if Berger's argument for the expansion of human experience and the identification of "signals of transcendence" in concrete experiences were discounted because it failed to grasp the true wideness of human experience and the direct availability of the sacred! But this is precisely the fundamental weakness in Berger's argument.

Berger's failure, then, raises the question: is it possible to envision a form of human existence that overcomes Berger's residual secularity, takes seriously the expanded human experience endorsed by the new pagans, and yet is genuinely Christian? With this question in mind, let us consider the position of Morton Kelsey to determine whether his work will answer our question.

Kelsey's work<sup>29</sup> is still little known in Protestant

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<sup>26</sup>See above, Chapter 1, p. 55.

<sup>27</sup>See above, Chapter 1, p. 50.

<sup>28</sup>See above, Chapter 1, p. 48, n. 81.

<sup>29</sup>The most important of Kelsey's published writing is included in the bibliography.

theological circles, but its great strength lies at just this point--the *Christian* possibilities in a "post-secular" world in which the full range of human experience is admitted into consciousness. He provides important clues about how we may proceed to create a viable Christian future. Kelsey thinks that the world of secular atheism has been breaking down since the beginning of this century when the natural and human sciences began to reach beyond the limits of the Newtonian world view.<sup>30</sup> Quantum physics challenged our common sense (Aristotelian/Newtonian) understanding of matter; Einstein called into question the absolute character of space-time relations; the completeness and consistency of conscious rationality was questioned by Gödel when he proved that arithmetic was not a complete and consistent system;<sup>31</sup> our view of the human body as merely a highly sophisticated machine broke down during discoveries of "mind-body" relations in psychosomatic medicine;<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Morton T. Kelsey, *Encounter with God* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1972), pp. 93f.

<sup>31</sup>See also Ernest Nagel and James R. Newman, *Gödel's Proof* (New York: New York University Press, 1958). This is a simplified explanation of the proof and its importance for persons without extensive mathematical training.

<sup>32</sup>See also Morton T. Kelsey, *Healing and Christianity in Ancient Thought and Modern Times* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), especially Chapter 10, pp. 243f.

and Freud showed us that our psyches are deeper than consciousness. But Kelsey considers the work of C.G. Jung to be the most important part of this avalanche of startling and disconcerting scientific data. Kelsey is convinced that taken together all these scientific discoveries imply that we live in a world utterly different from that presupposed by our common-sense secularity.

Not only is the world "out there" utterly different from what we had expected, but also our experience of that world is correspondingly wider, deeper, and richer than all but a few of us have admitted. Kelsey lists eight kinds of experiences which have been systematically eliminated from the consciousness of modern persons--all of which are important in relating us to the deeper and equally important (though consistently denied) aspects of ourselves and our world:<sup>33</sup>

1. Dreams and visions (visions are dreams one has while he is awake<sup>34</sup>);
2. Various religious experiences and experiences of numinous intensity: e.g., mystical experience, speaking in tongues, healing--and, especially, love;
3. The demonic: e.g., anxiety, depression, dissociation, hallucination;

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<sup>33</sup>The following list is from Kelsey, *Encounter with God*, pp. 129f.

<sup>34</sup>Morton T. Kelsey, *Dreams* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), pp. 19-20, 38-39, 111-112.

4. Memory;
5. Phantasy<sup>35</sup>("Phantasy is more spontaneous and more demanding than day dreaming. It is closely akin to the vision and has the quality of religious meditation."<sup>36</sup>);
6. The capacity to grasp mathematical and other abstract concepts intuitively or imaginatively;
7. Intuitive flashes;
8. Extrasensory perception.

The fundamental contention underlying Kelsey's discussions of these experiences is that neither theology nor Christian living can be done in an experiential vacuum. These only have vitality, power, and existential reality when Christian faith is not only a matter of belief but of experience. Christian existence emerges as an enlivening and energizing structure of human existence when it begins to flow out of these kinds of experiences. Thought and theology are not unimportant; nor is Kelsey's program an exercise in anti-intellectuality. Rather *Encounter with God* is an attempt to *think* in Christian terms about all these experiences. But thinking and theologizing are always thought *about* human experience; and when the experience is

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<sup>35</sup>I have followed Kelsey's spelling, "phantasy," instead of the more usual "fantasy." Perhaps one reason for Kelsey's unusual spelling is to distinguish "phantasy" from "the fantastic."

<sup>36</sup>Kelsey, *Encounter with God*, pp. 131, 185f. For Kelsey, "phantasy" and "imagination" are almost synonymous.



restricted, the theology too will be impoverished. From the basis of these experiences, Kelsey proposes that an "empirical theology" is possible.

If this is true, an expanded empiricism is indicated. Such an approach to men's experiences could easily be the base for an empirical theology which could be grasped by anyone willing to submit to the necessary experiences and discover its truth. Many persons have discovered just this; they have asked for verification and found it as they followed the way laid out by Jesus of Nazareth and the great spiritual directors of Christianity. These persons have come to know the objectivity of the world of the spirit and the necessity of dealing with it.<sup>37</sup>

In this statement, the seriousness with which Kelsey takes the *objectivity* of the spiritual world should not be overlooked.<sup>38</sup> He insists that these eight kinds of experiences sometimes communicate data about spiritual reality. It is practically a fact that extrasensory perception is a direct communication of often highly accurate information within the psycho-physical world. And Kelsey is convinced that dreams, phantasies, and "religious experiences" of various sorts similarly communicate equally reliable

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 133-134.

<sup>38</sup>Kelsey thinks of physical and spiritual reality as discreet and distinct kinds of reality. Cobb's Whiteheadian theology provides what seems to me a more plausible understanding which allows one to think of both "spiritual" and "physical" realities in terms of one model--the actual occasion. See John B. Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), chapters 2, 4, 5; and John B. Cobb, Jr., *God and the World* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 69-84.

information about spiritual reality--and ultimately about God. He understands spiritual reality to exist independently of man and to be autonomous, and human persons experience this reality as surely as they experience the physical world. We have discussed above Berger's acceptance of the "supernatural" as a projection and his asking whether that projection were true.<sup>39</sup> With Kelsey's work, this question is intensified. Given our narrowly empirical bias, to speak of dreams and religious experience as communicating information of an objective spiritual reality is to speak nonsense. We would feel more comfortable if we understood such experiences as our own psychological projections. Of course, Kelsey is aware that such mere projections do occur and that the emotional character of certain experiences sometimes deceives us about their actual character.<sup>40</sup> But such mistakes do not by themselves eliminate the possibility that in some of our experiences we do encounter an objective reality.

There is an interesting (and almost amusing) "twist" to this issue. Philosophy in the West since the time of Hume and Kant has recognized that it is impossible to *prove* even that the physical world exists objectively

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<sup>39</sup>Berger, p. 104. See above, p. 65.

<sup>40</sup>Kelsey, *Encounter with God*, p. 129, for example.

and independently of human experience. Anytime we reflect on the way we gain knowledge about the physical world, we find that it is impossible to move beyond our sense experience to the "thing-in-itself."<sup>41</sup> I cannot *prove* that the typewriter which I now perceive myself to be using really exists independently of my perceptions of it. I can see it, feel it, and hear it, but each of these is a part of my subjective experience; there is no way that I can get outside my subjectivity to discover whether the typewriter is really "out there." I cannot be certain that there is an objective typewriter out there which "causes" my perceptions and that the typewriter is not just a "projection" out of my own subjectivity. This places the problem of projection of spiritual reality in an interesting context. Ultimately, all we can know as *certain* are the contents of our own experience. All I can know *absolutely for sure* is the flow of my own subjectivity. But within that subjective experience, there are elements which "feel" objective, autonomous, independent of me. I cannot finally prove that they are objective to me, but I have a powerful and almost undeniable sense within my experience itself that they are. Kelsey observes that spiritual reality cannot be proved as

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<sup>41</sup>For another example of this line of thinking, see John B. Cobb, Jr., *Is It Too Late?* (Beverly Hills, CA: Bruce, 1972), pp. 101f.

an objective reality any more than the physical world can because here again we are locked in the prison of our own subjective experience. But there are elements in our subjectivity which, though different from those of the physical world--have a similar kind of stubborn "otherness" which convinces me that I am experiencing a reality which is objective, autonomous, and independent of my experience of it. In such cases, the best--though, to be sure, not the only, understanding of that experience is to posit the objective existence of some spiritual reality. Thus, one of the crucial tasks of Christian living, and especially of theology, is to distinguish between those portions of our experience which are mere projection and which--perhaps because of their emotional intensity--we tend to evaluate too highly and those portions which can legitimately be understood as objective and "other." Having made that distinction, we can begin to organize and interpret our experience and to think systematically about it. But underlying such thinking and prior to it, there must be a base of primary experience--experience of the physical and spiritual dimensions of the world. Such experience is prior to all kinds of reflection on experience.

Another result of the placement of priority on experience is that it cannot be made the special possession of any one group.

Religious experiences do not belong just to the intelligent or the sophisticated. Quite the contrary, they are given to children and simple peasants, as well as to philosophers and theologians; they come to sinners bent on destruction, as well as to pious folk who feel they need no special help. This encounter is the real leveler of mankind.<sup>42</sup>

Kelsey would disagree with Berger's claim that "religious" experience is not universal and, therefore, not a particularly good base from which to argue for the reality of the "supernatural."<sup>43</sup> Kelsey, however, prefers to understand religious experience more broadly and, therefore, sees its availability to all. Religious experience does not include only moments of mystical ecstasy but also those kinds and dimensions of experience which occur for everybody and which can be brought into the consciousness of anybody who is willing to pay attention to them. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is dreams. Though many persons claim that they never dream, it has been amply proved that everybody does dream whether or not he remembers his dreams or makes an effort to remember them.<sup>44</sup> Many dreams can be considered "merely subjective" and tell us about the condition of our own souls. But there are

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<sup>42</sup>Kelsey, *Encounter with God*, p. 148.

<sup>43</sup>See above, p. 70.

<sup>44</sup>See Kelsey, *Dreams*, pp. 215-219.

dreams which have a numinous quality about them and which, if Kelsey is right, can be understood as encounters of the human soul with God.<sup>45</sup> It is, of course, true that some persons seem to be inherently more "spiritually sensitive" than others, but everyone has within his experience the resources for some significant encounter--if not through the more paranormal kinds of experience, at least through dreams, phantasy, or love.

"Love," for Morton Kelsey, is the ultimate quality of spiritual reality, and perhaps it can serve as an example to illumine this discussion as well as to show its relation to Christian existence. Love, for Kelsey, is not the romantic and obsessive perversions which commonly appropriate the name. Instead, he means a kind of concentrated caring--both in inner intention and in outward action--for another person. The focus of such love is entirely "for the other," for him in his intrinsic value and worth. Because the other self is seen as a center of inherent value and beauty, love is a concentration *on* the other, entirely *for* the other. Love seeks to acknowledge,

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 211, 226-228. Kelsey documents this view as the dominant understanding of dreams in classical antiquity and in the early church and the way this view became lost. Chapters 3, 4, 5; pp. 49-192. He also contends that even those dreams which on the surface do not appear to be *direct* encounters with God often have potent religious significance for the dreamer. Pp. 228-232.

celebrate, and heighten the intrinsic value and beauty of the other self or soul. The merit of the other or the needs of the self are not the focus of love. Love is for the other in his intrinsic value and beauty.

If a person is to love another in this way, he cannot suppose that he already knows the way in which this specific other person is best to be loved; and to find out, he must listen to him.

Another corollary of love is our need to practice listening. By this I mean the forgotten art of listening in which one empties himself and lets the totality of another personality make an impact upon his inmost being. . . . In real listening it is because we love and want the other person to be what he is; we listen to him as God listens lovingly to us.<sup>46</sup>

Because love is being "for the other" and is concerned that the other "be what he is" as completely as possible, love listens. Love is not just vague feelings of goodwill, it is specific and is directed to the specific actuality of the other. That love listens already implies that love includes a "separateness" between the two persons; there is no attempt to fuse the two personalities or to achieve a union which violates or compromises the individual integrity of either. It is love which cares "for the other" and which does not try to meet the needs of the self at the expense of the other or to lose the self in union with the other.

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<sup>46</sup>Kelsey, *Encounter with God*, p. 203.

Clearly, this is a kind of love which most of us most of the time are unable to perform. Psychic evolution has brought us to an intense form of self-consciousness which most of the time could more accurately be called a "self-preoccupation."<sup>47</sup> We find it practically impossible to transcend our self-preoccupation to achieve genuine love, being for the other. Moreover, if we identify ourselves as Christians and participate in a Christian community, we probably feel some demand, some "ought," connected with such love. We actually feel that we ought to love others in this way, but our sense of "ought" only intensifies our sense of inadequacy and inability to love.

Love is, therefore, on the one hand, the only salvation of the spiritual man and, on the other hand, unattainable by his own efforts. The spiritual man can only love when he is freed from the necessity to love, that is, when he knows himself already loved in his self-preoccupation. Only if man finds that he is already accepted in his sin and sickness, can he accept his own self-preoccupation as it is; and only then can his psychic economy be opened toward others, to accept them as they are--not in order to save himself, but because he doesn't need to save himself. We love only because we are first loved. In this way, and only in this way, can the spiritual man genuinely and purely love.<sup>48</sup>

We can only be for the other as he is when we find that we are genuinely loved as we are. But this does not work very

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<sup>47</sup>John B. Cobb, Jr., *Structure of Christian Existence* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), pp. 119-124, 134-136.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 135.



often for us if it is restricted to the level of ideas. The realization that we are loved must penetrate us deeper than our rationality or our intellectuality. Finally, we must *experience* ourselves as loved if we are to be freed to love others in an authentic way.

The ultimate character of spiritual reality is love. Kelsey is careful to caution persons explicitly about the demonic side of spiritual reality, but the demonic is not the final word. Love is the ultimate quality of spiritual reality; it overcomes the demonic in us and by loving each of us enables us genuinely to love other persons. To describe this ultimate character of love, Kelsey turns to his mentor, C.G. Jung:

Love "bears all things" and "endures all things." These words say all there is to be said; nothing can be added to them. For we are in the deepest sense the victims and the instruments of cosmogonic "love."  
 . . . Being a part man cannot grasp the whole. He is at its mercy. He may assent to it, or rebel against it; but he is always caught up by it and enclosed within it. He is dependent upon it and is sustained by it. Love is his light and his darkness, whose end he cannot see. "Love ceases not"--whether he speaks with the "tongues of angels," or with scientific exactitude traces the life of the cell down to its uttermost source. Man can try to name love, showering upon it all the names at his command, and still he will involve himself in endless self-deceptions. If he possesses a grain of wisdom, he will lay down his arms and name the unknown by the more unknown, *ignotum per ignotius*--that is, by the name of God.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>C.G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 353. Quoted in Kelsey, *Encounter with God*, pp. 120-121.

Such love is not only a belief about the world; it can be, and sometimes is, a factor of our concrete experience. If we open ourselves to the full range and depth of our experience, such love can be concretely present for us--to enliven and enrich our lives and to free and enable us genuinely to love others. It is important that we think about and conceptualize this love, but it is more important that we experience it. Only in concrete experience in which love becomes actual for us can love free us from our self-preoccupation, enable us to love ourselves as we are, and free us to love others as they are. If Kelsey is right, this love is available to every person in his or her actual experience. It is available to everyone in dreams and phantasy and to many (possibly even to all in some degree) in the paranormal kinds of experience. And it is often available in our normal, waking, experience with other persons. In his statement about listening, Kelsey says,

I mean the forgotten art of listening in which one empties himself and lets the totality of another personality make an impact upon his inmost being. As one discovers the totality of the other human psyche which confronts him, he can come to know the Holy Spirit which dwells and moves in the depth of the other person's soul. One can thus come to a divine encounter through another person's soul by listening.<sup>50</sup>

The need for an experiential basis is a need not only for wider experience--that is, allowing into our consciousness

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<sup>50</sup>Kelsey, *Encounter with God*, p. 203.

more different experiences, many of which we now consider trivial; it is also a need for *deeper* experience--perceiving the movements of the Spirit, the dynamics of love, below the surface of our ordinary lives. What is needed is a recovery of the full range of human experience, both in its wideness and in its depth, because only then can we maximize the spiritual power of love in our actual lives.

It is probably obvious that in discussing the dynamics of love, we have been considering the structure of Christian existence. And more centrally, we have been probing the possibility that God's grace can again be a vivid and energizing factor for persons in the modern world. Our fundamental contention is that only as grace becomes actual for us in some very concrete way can it revitalize Christian existence--can it free us from our self-preoccupation and enable us to love others genuinely. This means that grace must be identifiable in our experience. The remoteness of God and his grace from the modern world is a function as much of the modern poverty of human experience as it is of the restrictive intellectual categories of the Newtonian worldview or of what Cobb calls the "dominant philosophy." Moreover, God will not again be perceived as near if he is only *understood* to be near; his presence can be vivid only if his grace is identifiable in the concrete dynamics of our actual experience. Such

identification is not impossible, but it means that we must again be open to the width and depth of our experience in a way that is unusual for the modern world.

At this point it is important to note that this argument for wider and deeper Christian experience is not an attempt to identify grace with particular experiences in any simple way. When simple identification occurs, we evoke what I call the "insidiousness dynamic" of our tendency to earn love. When grace becomes identical with any experience or when any specific experience is seen as the necessary result of grace, then we inevitably begin to work harder to produce the specific experiences. This has occurred in the pentecostal churches with the phenomenon of speaking in tongues and in evangelical communities with conversion experiences. Persons feel, "I am not loved just like I am; I cannot be loved until I have certain kinds of experiences in which I *feel* loved." Grace is not simply any human experience or any feeling however beatific. Grace is God's love for every person *without condition*--even without the condition of one's experiencing it. There is always risk involved in attempting to make that love concrete and specific because specificity tempts us to try to duplicate the phenomena rather than to be open to the possibility that God's grace may come to us as a gift. No experience--paranormal or otherwise--can be guaranteed to

bring God's grace into our consciousness. But if we are open to the width and depth of our experience, it is likely that there will be moments in which a numinously powerful love will happen to us and for us. And in those moments we will know that we have received a great gift which we could not earn. Perhaps we will see that it could not have happened in the same way without our effort, without our attending to particular portions of our experience. But in those moments, we will see that our efforts did not produce it and that it happened in spite of our efforts. Perhaps it will happen in a dream or in a meditative phantasy, perhaps in the depth of encounter with another person, or even as an intuitive flash out of "nowhere." However it happens, we will know that God is for us. And if it is truly grace which breaks into our consciousness, we will find that, because God is for us, we are freed to be for others. If God truly is for us, he is for us in every occasion of experience--whether or not we are aware of him. But we need moments in which his love breaks through into our consciousness, and we know that he is near. Without such moments, Christian existence becomes exhaustively difficult to maintain. Love for the other becomes a burden and an impossible demand instead of a joy and an expression of freedom. Experience of grace is not grace itself, but it is the means by which grace becomes concretely powerful.

Grace is present in every moment of our lives, but there can be moments of special brilliance and power if we are willing to attend to the width and depth of our experience.

That Christians can again perceive God as near in the immediacy of their actual experience is a source of hope. And that there are movements within our culture which may open the possibility that Christian existence and the cultural "spirit" can co-exist in healthy tension is a further encouragement. If both of these possibilities mature into actuality, perhaps we will have found a way into Cobb's "post-modern world"<sup>51</sup>--a world in which both Christian existence and cultural life will be very different but a world in which God's grace can be a vivid and powerful factor in human life. If such a world were to occur, we could yet avoid the desperate choice between an entrenched Christian ghetto (on the one hand) and secular atheism or the new paganism on the other. And we might also find that a rich liturgical life was again possible. Indeed, this is also our hope for genuine liturgical renewal.

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<sup>51</sup>Cobb, "From Crisis Theology . . . ," p. 245.  
See above, p. 58-59.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITURGY AND EXPERIENCE

This essay began by describing the mutual dependence of Christian liturgy and the subjective dynamics of Christian existence. Subsequently, we have considered the ways in which secularity undermines Christian existence by placing stringent restrictions on persons' experience. And we have suggested the possibility that these secular restrictions may be overcome and that Christian persons may become able to sense the presence of God in the immediacy of their actual experience. Now it is time for us to look more specifically at the relation between Christian experience and the church's liturgy.

The fundamental conviction of this essay is that liturgy and experience are mutually related. But this mutual relation is much more complex than any simple "one-to-one" correlation. Thus, from the perspective of this fundamental conviction, it is inadequate to reduce liturgy to religious experience or to reduce religious experience to liturgy. Religious experience involves more than "going to church" or "saying mass"; and liturgy does more than simply facilitate religious experience. Nevertheless, the two are inseparable. Without experiences in which one

consciously perceives God to be present and active for him, the liturgy seems to celebrate the trivial or the unreal. But without participation in Christian liturgy (or other activities whose results are similar) persons' experiences will not become structured in specifically Christian ways. That is, all one's experiences necessarily have some structure; but the possibility that these experiential structures will be shaped into Christian existence is partly a function of one's participation in the rhythms of Christian celebration.

The understanding of liturgy developed on this conviction is not an exhaustive one. Liturgy does much more than inform and support Christian existence. And undoubtedly, few persons intend to "inform their Christian existence" when they "go to church." Though many may think that corporate worship somehow makes them better Christians, other understandings also abound. What is said below is not necessarily meant to contradict any of these other understandings, but only to present one perspective on the relation between liturgy and experience. Other understandings may indeed also be true; thus, a "both/and" rather than an "either/or" position may be the most tenable one.

With this acknowledgment, let us begin our consideration of the relation between liturgy and experience by thinking of Christian liturgy as the participation of a



group of persons in the creation of a particular kind of "perceptible form." This kind of perceptible form, furthermore, is one which expresses the dynamics of feeling characteristic of the experience of God's grace. The dependence of this understanding of Jack Coogan's aesthetic analysis of liturgy is obvious from his definition. Coogan says that liturgy occurs whenever ". . . a group of persons participate directly in the creation of a perceptible form which primarily expresses the nature of the feeling which is associated with experience which they have in common."<sup>1</sup> By his use of "perceptible form," Coogan suggests that liturgy, like art, creates non-discursive symbols in media that are accessible to perception. Now, the crucial importance of non-discursive symbols is their ability to articulate and express the patterns or rhythms which are present in the flow of immediate, subjective, human experience. Langer asserts that there is order or pattern in such experience or "feeling" and that art is the attempt to create in some perceptible medium (like sound, stone, projected light, physical human movement, etc.) patterns which are so closely analogous to the patterns of subjective experience that they function as their symbols. For example, in speaking of music, she says:

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<sup>1</sup>William Jack Coogan, "Worship as Expressive Form" (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, School of Theology at Claremont, CA, 1967), p. 31.

. . . there are certain aspects of the so-called "inner life". . . which have formal properties similar to those of music--patterns of motion and rest, of tension and release, of agreement and disagreement, preparation, fulfillment, excitation, sudden change, etc.<sup>2</sup>

Because the non-discursive symbols of art have the capacity to be conformed to the form of human feeling, they function to make external and perceptible that which is internal and unobservable.<sup>3</sup> Thus, they make a fleeting and elusive human experience available for a longer period of time for contemplation and reflection. A feeling is not lost as soon as it has slipped out of subjective immediacy; its pattern is embodied in some perceptible form which is continually available.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the preservation of the forms of human feeling in some external medium affords persons the opportunity to participate in and to assimilate experiences which they have not themselves experienced in their own lives. Thus, a person's store of experience can be broadened and deepened (as well as clarified) by exposure to the human feeling embodied in art.

It is important to note that art does not reproduce or re-create particular feeling but expresses it or articulates it. In fact, Langer says that the emotive aspect of

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<sup>2</sup>Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (New York: New American Library, 1942, 1951), p. 193.

<sup>3</sup>Coogan, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 29.

an art work is ". . . as objective as the physical form, color, sound pattern . . ." of a work.<sup>5</sup> Art does not try to make its audience feel a particular way, but offers it the opportunity to reflect on, to consider, to gain insight into particular feelings. Art does not facilitate feeling itself, but the understanding of feeling.<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that art is devoid of emotional involvement; on the contrary, an art work often evokes intense feeling, and some emotional involvement is necessary if one is to grasp the rhythms of subjectivity articulated in the work. But no work of art re-creates in all of its immediacy and concreteness the experience whose patterns it articulates. This is the basis of "aesthetic distance."<sup>7</sup> By involvement in art, persons are involved in an experience but "from a distance." That is, they are able also to observe it, to reflect on it, to compare it to other feelings, to assess the importance and impact of this patterned experience for their own lives--at the same time they are involved in it. The degree of possible clarity this

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<sup>5</sup>Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 18.

<sup>6</sup>At one point, Langer says that the goal of art is ". . . not experience of feelings . . . , but knowledge about them." Langer, *Feeling and Form*, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup>Coogan, p. 30.

affords is practically impossible for most of us in the immediacy of our own experience; but painting, music, drama, dance, and the other arts offer us the unique opportunity to be involved participant and reflective observer simultaneously.

Now, how does this notion of significant, perceptible form apply to liturgy? Coogan's position is that liturgy does the same thing that art does: it creates in a perceptible medium a significant form which expresses the patterns and rhythms of certain human experiences.<sup>8</sup> Christian liturgy, however, attempts to articulate a special class of human experiences--namely, those experiences which are identified as embodying Christian existence or the gospel.<sup>9</sup> Christian liturgy expresses the significant form of those patterns of feeling that are characteristic of human experience when persons are grasped by the radical demand

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<sup>8</sup>This is not to say that liturgy does *only* this. The definition proposed here is *not* an *exhaustive* one. But it is to claim that this, when combined with "participation" (to be discussed below, pp. 97f.), is characteristic of liturgy and can be used to create, identify, and evaluate liturgical events.

<sup>9</sup>Coogan's formulation of the aesthetic character of liturgy is an attempt to understand what is common to *all* liturgy. In the present essay we are trying to understand Coogan's formulation more specifically in terms of Christian liturgy. Thus, we are saying that the experiences whose pattern of feeling Christian liturgy expresses are characteristically Christian experiences--that is, experiences of grace.

and radical grace of God which Jesus announced. But this much could be said of Christian art in general. Is there anything unique and distinctive of liturgy?

Coogan identifies the unique feature of liturgy--that characteristic which distinguishes it from other aesthetic forms--as "participation." To understand the meaning of "participation," as Coogan uses it, consider the creative process of a performance art like music. Coogan asserts that most basically there are two steps in this process: first, the composer creates ". . . a more-or-less detailed blueprint for . . . [the] realization" of the final form, but he does not create the final form itself; a second step is required in which the "performers" actually realize the final form of the work--normally in the presence of an audience.<sup>10</sup> Liturgical creation follows a similar two-step pattern. First, a blueprint (liturgical text and rubrics) is designed; and second, the blueprint is used as a guide in the creation of the final form (the liturgical event). But there is an important difference between the way the musical form is finally realized ( e.g., in a concert) and the way a liturgical one is realized. In a concert, there is a clear distinction between performers and audience; however *involved* an audience may be, they do not

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<sup>10</sup>Coogan, p. 32.

directly *participate* in the creation of the final musical form. But in liturgy, there is no audience; the members of the congregation are themselves the performers, the ones who bring the liturgy to completion in an actual event. The presiding clergy, choir, altar boys, acolytes, and miscellaneous liturgical personnel are not to be thought of as the dramatic cast who enact a play before an audience (congregation). Their roles are those of director, orchestra conductor, prompter, and stage hands. The dramatic cast is the congregation; it is they who must fully *participate* in the actual realization, the final creation, of the liturgical form. Otherwise, ". . . the basic distinction between liturgy and drama disappears, and the service becomes a play or concert . . ." <sup>11</sup> Coogan consistently emphasizes that this kind of participation is the unique and decisive feature of liturgy--so much so that the history of the liturgical life of the Western Church could be written as the continuing attempt to recover participational liturgy when it has been lost. <sup>12</sup> There is, however, one problem with the term "participation." It does not adequately suggest the distinction between the kind of participation which a performer has (Coogan's usage) and the

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

kind of participation or involvement which an audience has in a drama or concert. There is nothing about the term itself (prior to careful explanation) to indicate that audience-involvement is not what is meant. Other possible terms (for example, "performance," "re-creation,") seem to be awkward and unacceptable. Perhaps, the entire congregation should be referred to as "liturgists" or "celebrants" (to use liturgical terms) and the "stage hands" should be called "leaders" and the presiding minister "president." But it is unlikely that long established usage can be easily changed. Therefore, when "participation" and "participant" are used to describe congregational realization of liturgical forms, care must be used to clarify the meaning. For the purpose of clarity in this essay, "participation" is being used to identify congregational creation of liturgical forms and "involvement" to identify the kind of participation an audience has when it views a drama.

Christian liturgy, then, can be understood as the active participation of a congregation in the creation of a perceptible form which articulates the pattern of feeling associated with conscious experience of grace. But the specific experiences which the liturgy symbolizes are not necessarily the actual experiences of those persons who are participating in the liturgy. Christian liturgy has tended

to draw its liturgical motifs from the classical events of Christian experience. Both the imagery and structure of the eucharist and the symbolic cycle of the church year (the overwhelmingly dominant forms of Christian liturgy) come from the paradigmatic events of all Christian experience--the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the founding and ministry of the early church. These events are the foundation of Christian tradition, but originally they were human experiences--the concrete, actual, specific experiences of human persons, of Jesus and his disciples and those persons who soon came to accept the new way. When the eucharist is celebrated on Easter Sunday in the year 1973, the specific experiences which are symbolized in that liturgy are not necessarily the actual experiences of the persons who are directly participating in the liturgy. The last supper and the resurrection meals of Jesus and his disciples were actual human experiences almost two thousand years ago, but they are not the actual experiences of the persons who celebrate the eucharist in 1973. In which way, then, can the rehearsal of these past events or the expression of the pattern of feeling inherent in those experiences have significant relevance for persons alive today?<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>There are three sets of human experiences being distinguished here: (1) the congregation's experience of



The answer to this question helps to clarify the relation between the need of contemporary persons for wider and deeper experience and liturgical expression. A liturgy, or another kind of artistic creation, need not directly symbolize our actual experience in order to have meaning or "import"<sup>14</sup> for us. One of the functions of all art--and liturgy too--is to broaden and enrich human experience. By preserving the pattern of human feeling in

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doing the liturgy; (2) the experiences of the members of the congregation which occur outside the corporate worship event; and (3) the actual experiences of Jesus and his disciples which occurred two thousand years ago. The point is that when symbols are created in Christian liturgy ("experience set 1"), the liturgy's specific symbolic motifs are *not* usually drawn from the actual life experiences of the members of the congregation ("set 2"). Instead, most Christian liturgies draw their symbolic material from a set of human experiences which occurred two thousand years ago ("set 3"). The question which this situation poses is How can symbolic forms drawn from two-thousand-year-old experience be existentially potent for persons today? Part of an answer is proposed below. It suggests that traditional liturgical forms can be existentially potent for modern persons only if modern persons enjoy some experiences which have patterns of feeling congruent with those the liturgical symbols express. That is, when "experience set 2" contains moments which are subjectively similar to the decisive moments of "experience set 3," then the liturgical symbols also actually express *contemporary* dynamics of feeling--even though the specific motifs are not drawn from contemporary experience. This, however, is not a total answer; it may still be necessary for the church to create liturgical forms whose specific symbolic motifs are drawn from contemporary experience. But even so, it would still be necessary for such liturgical symbols to express the dynamics of feeling of *both* "experience set 2" and "set 3." Also, see below, pp. 114-115.

<sup>14</sup>Langer, *Feeling and Form*, pp. 31-32.

perceptible form, art makes available to persons experiences they have not enjoyed in their own lives. Few of us, for example, have experienced a crisis of conscience as extreme as that which is portrayed in the character of John Procter in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. But by viewing and becoming involved in this drama, our experience is enriched, broadened, and deepened. We identify with the dramatic character John Procter, and from a distance we feel the dynamics of his anguished struggle. We may never in our own lives be forced to face such a crisis ourselves, but our experience is richer and our humanity fuller because we have been involved in Procter's agony. Procter's struggle is, therefore, relevant to us even though we have not experienced it directly. But we would not feel the same relevance if we perceived "Procter's experience" as utterly implausible. There must be some congruence between the symbolic form and our experience if this relevance is to occur. Had *The Crucible* seriously portrayed Procter as a mystic who resolved his crisis of conscience by withdrawal into ecstasy, many modern persons might have admired him but few would have identified with him or felt the drama to have powerful relevance for them. It would, instead, have been irrelevant.

Our liturgical situation is similar. The liturgy articulates the form, shape, or rhythm of human feeling

which is inherent in experiences which seem alien and impossible to most modern persons. There is little congruence between the subjective dynamics of the experience of grace and the forms of feeling inherent in that narrow and restrictive range of experience which most secular persons admit into consciousness.<sup>15</sup> This is the heart of the present liturgical crisis. The liturgy creates a significant form in which most modern persons cannot recognize the shape of their own experience. The problem is not that the liturgy does not symbolize my actual experience; the liturgies of the church have not done that for almost two thousand years. The problem is that the experiences which the liturgy articulates no longer seem congruent with persons' conscious experience. This is a problem which cannot be solved by liturgical means alone; simply altering liturgical forms or styles is an inadequate solution because it leaves the deeper problem of the relation of liturgy to contemporary experience unresolved. A renewal of Christian experience (perhaps along the lines outlined in Chapter 2), as well as a reformation of liturgical practice, is necessary if a fully adequate solution is to be found. It is difficult to see how attempts to solve the problem with liturgical change alone could succeed. If

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<sup>15</sup>Cf. above, Chapter 1, pp.18f.and below, Appendix A.

the liturgy were to begin to symbolize those experiences which persons recognize as their own or as congruent with their own, the liturgy would cease to be Christian because it would no longer be articulating experiences of grace. And if the liturgy were stubbornly to refuse to be relevant to secular persons and continued to articulate the subjective rhythms of paradigmatic Christian experience, secular persons would increasingly perceive it as alien and trivial. The solution to this problem must have two foci--experiential and liturgical. And in our current setting, the experiential focus probably has some priority; that is, a pre-condition of vital, relevant liturgy is wide, deep experience. Liturgy can and does give shape and organization to our experience. But in order to identify God's grace in our experience, that experience must first be wide enough and deep enough to allow the dynamics of grace into consciousness.

Liturgy, like theology, is dependent on experience; it is an ordering and an articulation of emotional and subjective features of human experience. And it can be vigorous and alive, full of meaning and power, only when extra-liturgical experience is rich and full and open to the presence of God's grace. The actual experiences which the liturgy symbolizes do not necessarily have to be our own, but elements of our experience must be congruent with

the liturgical articulation for the liturgy to be relevant to us. Liturgy can allow us to enter into experiences which are not specifically ours; but to do so, the experiences must be congruent with our own. To make this clearer, let us consider the function of "decisive experiences." Within the flow of human living, some experiences emerge as decisive and paradigmatic. They are clearer, weightier, more powerful, and more important than most and seem to reveal the very nature and meaning of life and the world. Such experiences are "paradigmatic"<sup>16</sup> because they become the center around which our experience is organized and from which it is interpreted. They are the paradigms in reference to which all experience is understood. Thomas Ogletree aptly describes such experiences.

To say that a happening functions paradigmatically is to say that it provides the determinative clue for man's interpretation of what reality is all about. The assumption is that the fundamental character of reality, which is not apparent in ordinary experience as such, not even in its totality, has become manifest in this happening . . . . At the same time, because this happening has the power to illumine the totality of experience, it has a positive relation to all other happenings, involving and encompassing their reality.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>I owe my first acquaintance with the idea of "paradigmatic" experiences to an article by Nathan A. Scott, Jr., "The Broken Center: A Definition of the Crisis of Values in Modern Literature," in *Symbolism in Religion and Literature* (New York: Braziller, 1958), pp. 182f.

<sup>17</sup>Thomas Ogletree, "A Christological Assessment of Dipolar Theism," in *Process Philosophy and Christian Thought* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), pp. 338-339.

For Christians, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ have been the supreme paradigm by which the lives of individuals and communities have been interpreted. The events and human experiences surrounding Jesus form an experiential complex which is decisive in its utterly plain actualization of grace. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, in the gift of the Holy Spirit, and in the responses of the earliest Christians, the powerful availability of God's love is most vividly present and the demand for persons similarly to love each other is radically articulated. The core of this paradigm is the death and resurrection of Jesus; and here, even death, even murder and betrayal and cowardice are overcome by God's love in the resurrection of Jesus. Taken together, all these events are a fundamental clue about the nature of reality; they form the Christian model of what life, God, and the world are all about. And they are about grace: God's powerful patient, indefatigable love for every person--a love which frees persons for love and creativity and joyful living. Christians have consistently pointed to this as *the* decisive experience and have claimed that all life is to be ordered in terms of these events and understood in light of them.

In our individual experience, we often have illuminating moments, but the general flow of our subjectivity

is often marked by contradictions, confusions, and ambiguity. The angelic and the demonic usually seem equally dominant for us. We find ourselves loved and free to love about as often as we find ourselves ignored and rejected and about as often as we relate to others coldly, indifferently, or hostilely. The clarity and decisive quality of the Christian paradigm are a marked contrast to the ambiguity and contradictoriness of much of our experience. The widening and deepening of our experience does not completely alleviate this. Our dreams may occasionally reveal to us the numinous power of divine love; but about as often they are filled with our personal demons and the intransigence of our unresolved conflicts. Our relations with others sometimes become transparent to God's love, and we find ourselves both loved and loving. And in those moments we are sure that the love of God is what our lives and the world are all about. But such awareness is difficult to maintain in the exigencies of our daily living. Much more often we are confronted with indifference or hostility, and we are ourselves indifferent and hostile toward others. Our lives are filled with ambiguity and contradictions. Our personal moments of decisive significance are difficult to maintain at the center of our organization and interpretation of life.

Liturgy and theology have been ways in which the church has attempted to keep the decisive events of its paradigmatic past fresh and compelling. They are ways in which we are enabled to correlate the supreme paradigm with our own decisive experiences of grace, and by this correlation we are aided in maintaining our own decisive experiences at the determinative center of our structure of existence. Theology does this in a conceptual way. It isolates the discrete elements in experiences and shows their relations and qualities by arranging them in logical and rational explanations. In this way, theology seeks to bring conceptual clarity and intellectual plausibility to Christian existence. If it is successful, our own experience becomes conceptually clear, and we are able to understand that grace *is* finally decisive in our ambiguous experience because we are enabled to understand our experience in relation to the paradigmatic events of the Incarnation. But theology does one thing poorly: it has great difficulty clarifying, organizing, and interpreting the feeling side of human experience.<sup>18</sup> The actual *feeling of* being unconditionally and ultimately loved and being freed to love others is not done very well by theology. Rarely,

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<sup>18</sup>The kind of distinction made here between theology and liturgy is like that made by Coogan, pp. 26-29.



and then only obscurely, does theology show us what grace "feels like."<sup>19</sup>

But this is exactly what the liturgy does best. Liturgy articulates the form of human feeling and allows us to participate in the creation of significant forms which express the subjective dynamics of the experience of grace. It does this primarily by utilizing expressive motifs from the paradigmatic, decisive events of Jesus' ministry and by organizing them in such a way (i.e., non-discursively) that the subjective dynamics of decisive experiences are clearly articulated. What does it *feel like* to be loved unconditionally? What does it feel like to be freed to love others? What does it feel like to experience the unbearable demand of God to love others as joy and freedom? What does it feel like to realize that God's love overcomes even death? The church's best answer to these questions is its liturgy. But the answer is not primarily a verbal or a conceptual one. Through the rhythms of confession and forgiveness, of proclamation, affirmation, and prayer, and supremely through the rhythms of receiving, thanking, breaking, and giving and eating are the subjective dynamics of the experience of grace made plain. If the liturgy is successful, our own experiences

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<sup>19</sup>On the poor articulation of feeling by language, see Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, pp. 92, 224.

of grace are included also. When our own experiences are included, they become clarified for us. We see that our own experiences of grace "feel like" (are congruent with) the events of Jesus' ministry; therefore, these experiences begin to have a decisive character about them for us. We value them and begin to organize our lives and experience around them and to perceive all our lives in terms of them. Our own experiences of grace become correlated within us with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and, therefore, become part of the supreme paradigm. The strength of the liturgy is that it does this primarily at the level of feeling rather than at the level of concept. Of course, the liturgy includes theological concepts; but more centrally it articulates the dynamics of feeling inherent in the experience of grace. By learning what grace "feels like," we identify our own experiences of grace. They become decisive for us and contradictory experiences feel less powerful, less ultimate, less destructive. We even find that our lives are structured around grace and that we are living from grace. Consistent participation in liturgy strengthens and heightens our participation in Christian existence. By it are formed in us at the level of feeling the reflexes of Christian existence--openness to being loved and freedom to love others.

There are several ways in which our experiences of grace are correlated liturgically with the paradigmatic instances of God's grace. These will be more concretely considered in the next chapter in relation to possibilities of liturgical renewal. But at this point some clarity can be gained by a general overview of the possibilities. Traditionally, the liturgy has been structured around the paradigmatic events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. But within this traditional structure, contemporary experience has been included in the liturgy in four primary ways. First, contemporary experience has been shared and talked about. The dominant way in which this has been accomplished has been preaching in which the official leadership of the church attempts to articulate the contemporary relevance of the gospel. But in certain situations in which the congregation is small there is little reason why the members of the congregation cannot verbally share their contemporary experience. This need not presuppose the kind of preliminary study and preparation that is usually expected of a sermon. Indeed, it may often be spontaneous and unplanned. There are a number of points in the liturgy at which such sharing is possible: around the confession, the proclamation of the word, the affirmation of faith, the prayers for the world, and the eucharistic or thanksgiving prayer. All shared experiences might

not be conscious experiences of grace but rather situations which cry out for grace. But if the totality of congregational life encourages wide and deep experience, it is probable that vivid experiences of grace would occasionally be shared in the liturgy. This can become liturgically problematic, of course, in two ways. The practice can be abused by persons' competing for the greatest experience; the fate of "testimonials" in evangelical protestantism is a disconcerting example of this. And the emphasis on verbal "telling" tends to work against the fundamentally non-discursive character of the liturgy. But pastoral and educational work within the congregation should mitigate these problems to the point that the practice becomes liturgically viable. And if it "works" liturgically, it can have the significant benefit of allowing the congregation to consider the dynamics of contemporary experience in relation to the paradigmatic structures of grace.

Second, contemporary experience as been *thought about* in liturgical settings. Undoubtedly this has always been the case: as persons celebrate the eucharist or hear the word, fragments of daily life, aspects of significant inter-personal relationships, the pain of inner conflict, and even experiences in which God seemed very near invade the consciousness of the worshippers. Most often these are considered distractions to be repressed as quickly as

they arise. But it may be that sometimes for some persons such thoughts are not merely distractions but present opportunities for correlating and grasping the implicit congruence between the paradigmatic events of grace and the "graceful" moments in contemporary experience. Simply day-dreaming is different from a kind of intuitive reflection<sup>20</sup> which can also be called meditation. And it is possible in such reflection that the liturgical symbolization and one's own experience can come to a correlation in which the congruence between them is grasped intuitively.

Both of these ways are fundamentally conscious; they are ways in which the liturgical symbolization and our own experience become correlated in our conscious awareness. But, third, there is at least one way in which this happens unconsciously. The liturgy articulates the form of human feeling which is inherent in human experiences of God's grace. Having experienced God's grace in our own lives, we may find that we "feel with" the liturgy, that something in us "resonates" with its rhythms, that it strikes a "responsive chord" within us. We may not consciously remember actual experiences of grace, but the dynamics of those experiences may give us a sense of familiarity and positive

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<sup>20</sup>This kind of reflection is very much like what Kelsey calls "phantasy," which he carefully distinguishes from day-dreaming. See Kelsey, *Encounter with God*, p. 131.

response to the congruent dynamics articulated by the liturgy. The liturgy often functions in such an unconscious way: lifting experiences which we may never consciously remember to decisive importance because of their congruence with the experiential shape of the gospel. Such unremembered experiences may even become decisive in structuring our existence, becoming the basis by which we live from grace in the way we intuitively, immediately feel our subjective experience. Conceptually, this function of the liturgy may remain obscure to us, but it is the foundation of all our positive liturgical responses. Without this function, the liturgy would seem only anachronistic and trivial--totally irrelevant to our contemporary experience.

The final way in which our contemporary experience of grace is included in the liturgy is in its moderate forms very common but is potentially radical. Every age has found ways to articulate its own experience of God's grace in non-discursive forms and to include these forms in the liturgy. Wesleyan hymnody is a striking example. In their hymns, the Wesleys expressed the energy and the excitement of the eighteenth-century revival, and these hymns have found a lasting place among the liturgical forms of the whole church. In most ages, the contributions have been of a similar kind: the creation of liturgical forms which fill out and complete the basic structure of liturgical

action. Such additions (or accretions) are periodically cleared away when they begin to obscure the basic shape of the liturgy. But in their time they perform the significant function of giving the liturgy the feeling of contemporaneity and relevance to the real lives of the members of the celebrating congregation. Recently, this common liturgical principle has been the basis for radical liturgical suggestions.<sup>21</sup> If we can express our contemporary experience of God's grace in the creation of non-discursive forms for inclusion in the liturgy, why cannot we similarly express our experience in the creation of larger shapes of liturgical action? Must the events of Jesus' life be the source from which we draw the shape of liturgical action, or can our own experience provide the motifs by which the broader dynamics of the liturgy are structured? Such proposals are genuinely radical--though probably no more radical than the protestant rejection of weekly eucharist! This proposal will be considered in more detail below in our discussion of the possibilities of liturgical renewal. Here, it is enough to say that it is one alternative way in which contemporary experience of God's grace can be included in the church's liturgical life.

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<sup>21</sup>See Ross Snyder, *Contemporary Celebration* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971).

Now we can see that the relation of liturgy and experience is not a simple one. The liturgy is not just an opportunity for the facilitation of particular experiences. Liturgy is more an attempt to structure, order, clarify, and interpret the subjective dynamics of our experiential living. This is a crucially important function. Without it, our experience would remain ambiguous, contradictory, and muddled. Experiences of decisive importance with the passage of time would become less and less available to consciousness and less central to our structure of existence. Liturgy provides the opportunity for intuitively grasping and existentially appropriating the grace in our own experience and in the paradigmatic events of Jesus' ministry as the decisive clue by which our lives are structured, interpreted, and lived. The other side of this function of liturgy is the necessity of experience. If our experience is restricted and limited to the psychological processing of sense data, the liturgy's symbolization of grace may seem to point to trivial and impossible ranges of experience, the aberrations of a complex brain. The liturgy, of course, may sensitize us to grace so that we are able subsequently to identify it in our own experience. But even this cannot happen if we continually neglect the deeper and wider dimensions of experience in which grace is most likely to become clear to consciousness. If the



paranormal kinds of experiences and the depth dimension of normal experience never reach our consciousness, if we never perceive the creative power of God's love flowing toward us, the liturgy will seem an anachronistic rehearsal of dead events from the distant past, and the Christian paradigm will not become existentially decisive for us. Thus, the liturgy and experiences of grace are in a relationship of mutual dependence. Without rich experience, liturgy is anachronistic and irrelevant; and without liturgy, experience is an ambiguous muddle without clarity or interpretation at the feeling level.<sup>22</sup>

Two examples of the way liturgy articulates the subjective rhythms of Christian existence are appropriate here to clarify this rather theoretical discussion. However, it must be remembered that such a discussion can only suggest the liturgical articulation. Language is a poor vehicle for communicating the subjective dynamics of human experience--which is the reason for the importance of liturgy and the arts.<sup>23</sup> With this limitation in mind, let us consider a confession rite which has four parts: a call to confession, a unison prayer of confession, a declaration of forgiveness, and the passing of the peace. Though this

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<sup>22</sup>Of course, the church has used other means also to achieve this. But liturgy has been the dominant way the church has chosen to do it.

<sup>23</sup>Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, pp. 92, 224.

is a hypothetical rite, its basic form can be seen in a number of actual liturgies. The congregation begins, standing, having just completed a hymn. Someone speaks out in a loud voice; he calls to attention the "broken" condition of human existence in the world, the radical quality of God's demand, and the presence of grace. The congregation falls to its knees and prays--acknowledging its responsibility for what it is, confessing its failure to depend on God's love and to love all men, and asking for forgiveness and healing. Again, someone speaks out in a loud voice; he recalls God's grace, Jesus' resurrection, or the contemporary presence of divine love; and he declares that, because of Jesus' resurrection, grace is the final reality of all existence--"we are forgiven and free." Now the congregation is standing; the people are shaking hands, embracing, and saying something like, "The peace of God be always with you."

Within this liturgical movement, the motifs of demand and grace are obvious enough. But what is not obvious from such a verbal description is the *way* the liturgical action expresses the experience of demand, grace, and missional love. Missing is the sense of being confronted with whom one really is and the impossibility of God's demand, of recognizing need and openness as it is expressed in the movement from a standing to a kneeling position, of hearing

the word of grace come from beyond oneself, of remembering that God has acted and is acting for each man, of being liberated (expressed by moving from a kneeling to a standing posture), of being open and affirming to all those nearby which seems to flow directly out of moving from kneeling to standing. All of this is missing from the verbal description, but the liturgical act articulates this and more. And the perceptible form--acted out in sound and physical movement--expresses a crucial, subjective dynamic in Christian existence. It puts the experiential rhythms of demand, failure, forgiveness, and freedom before us for our participation and reflection. It allows the congregation to see this rhythm clearly, to identify it in their own lives, to see it as a decisive experience, and to order their future in terms of its importance. Little of this may happen on a conscious or rational level; but the impact is there. Moreover, the value of the liturgical form is heightened when the congregation is actively participating in its realization. They experience the form with greater intensity, gain a greater familiarity with it, and enhance their relationships with those who share the creation of the liturgy with them.<sup>24</sup>

If confession rites are clear articulations of the

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<sup>24</sup>Coogan, p. 34.

dynamics of Christian existence, the eucharist is the classic symbolization. The eucharist is the richest and most significant liturgical structure of the church, and it has a tremendous capacity to express the complexity and intensity of powerful experience.<sup>25</sup> Let us here simply point out some of the significant features of eucharistic symbolization. The eucharist is first of all "thanksgiving"--thanksgiving for God's revelation of his love in Jesus Christ and for all his gifts of grace in our contemporary lives. The articulation of joyous thanksgiving is initiated by the *sursum corda* and the singing of the *sanctus*. In some cases the congregation is kneeling or seated when the leader says, "Lift up your hearts!" Standing, reciting the paradigmatic experiences of God's grace in poetic dialogue, and singing praise to God ("Holy, holy, holy . . .")--these are the actions by which the congregation liturgically expresses its thanksgiving.<sup>26</sup> As the thanksgiving continues, it becomes more complex. The thanksgiving

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<sup>25</sup>Our earlier caution about the inability of language to convey the full meaning of non-discursive forms is again appropriate here--perhaps more so.

<sup>26</sup>It should perhaps be again explicitly noted that the eucharistic action described here is not totally dependent on the congregation's *feeling* thankful during the liturgy. The dynamics of thankful feeling are present *objectively* in the action of the liturgy as well as perhaps also in the subjective immediacies of the participants. See above, Chapter 3, p. 95.

remembers those decisive events for which it is most thankful. It not only mentions them, it acts them out. The remembrance of Jesus' death and resurrection are accompanied by the breaking of bread and by the holding up of bread and wine for all to see; the memory of Jesus' last supper and his resurrection meals<sup>27</sup> with his disciples is followed by the gathered community coming to the table; and the recognition that God's love extends to us and to every man is accompanied by the eating of bread and the drinking of wine with others. Thus, the symbolization of thanksgiving becomes also a symbolic expression of grace which then heightens and intensifies the thanksgiving. The actions of standing, remembering, reciting, breaking bread, holding up bread and wine, giving them, eating and drinking them do not have a one-to-one correlation with emotional components in the experience of grace.<sup>28</sup> But together they form a dynamic pattern which articulates the patterns of human

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<sup>27</sup>Cf. Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM Press, 1953), pp. 10-11, 15f.

<sup>28</sup>Langer points out that non-discursive symbolizations differ from language in that they have no vocabulary, no symbols which have a one-to-one correlation with discrete features of objective reality. Instead, the elements or motifs of non-discursive symbolizations create patterns which must be grasped *as a whole*; they are not built up by addition. See Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, pp. 76, 86-93, 193-194.

feeling which are characteristic of experiences of being loved, of realizing that love comes from beyond oneself from the heart of all that is, of sensing the terror of death and triumph of God's love even over death, of being freed from self-preoccupation and opened to love other persons. (Language is such a poor tool for expressing feeling that the most that can be done is to point to the kinds of experiences in which the feelings characteristically occur.) In short, these actions articulate the dynamics of grace. The congregation may not at that moment experience the numinous power of grace, but by participation in the liturgy the congregation is presented with the dynamics of grace by which they are enabled to identify and maximize the grace which has been present to their consciousnesses in other experiences. The eucharist is not a simple symbol or one that can easily be explained; but because of its complexity, it is capable of expressing the richness and variety and depth of experiences of grace. And it makes grace "available" for our reflection so that our existences may be more nearly shaped by its dynamics.

In these two examples, we can see somewhat more concretely the relationship between liturgy and experience. The congregation creates a perceptible form in speech, music, action, and physical objects. With these elements the members articulate the form of human feeling associated

with experience of grace. They are not necessarily expressing their own immediate feelings when they do this, although occasionally the liturgy may facilitate experience in which grace actually comes into consciousness. But most often the liturgy is *about* such experience, not a facilitation of such experience. If the liturgy is a vigorous and significant event for the congregation, the members in all probability are aware of moments in which they have experienced God's grace as a vivid and actual reality. And probably this did not happen in a liturgical setting, though it could have. But there is a special relevance between these experiences and the liturgical articulation: the liturgy "resonates" with these experiences and is verified by them; without their having occurred, the liturgy could not have significant relevance for the members of the congregation. Moreover, these experiences, though probably not consciously remembered, are given decisive importance by their resonance and correlation with the paradigmatic events of the gospel. By experience, the liturgy is verified; and by the liturgy, the experience of grace becomes decisive. In this, liturgy contributes to the way Christian existence is built up and strengthened in the lives of persons.

At this juncture, we can begin to move toward the final goal of our discussion--a more specific consideration

of the means to liturgical renewal--by considering two challenges to the understanding of Christian liturgy proposed here. The first challenge proposes that "worship" and "liturgy"<sup>29</sup> are opportunities for religious experience and are primarily to be understood as "means of grace." The most blatant forms of this understanding of liturgy think of God as present to the liturgical assembly in a special way which is different from this presence in other human experiences. Some persons may shy away from affirming that God is present in a different way and, instead, locate the difference in man: that is, because liturgy, it is claimed, makes man more aware of God's presence, conscious *experience* of God is more "available."<sup>30</sup> Paul Hoon's analysis of the roles of "impression" and "expression" in liturgy seems to move in this direction. Though Hoon emphasizes the objectivity of liturgical forms, one of the important functions of these forms for him is the facilitation of certain kinds of experience--the arousal of certain feeling-states.

The power of ritual . . . partly lies in its ability to reawaken, even reinstate emotional attitudes once experienced but presently lost. For many people the feeling-tone of certain bodily acts associated with experience

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<sup>29</sup>For a way of distinguishing between these terms, see Appendix B.

<sup>30</sup>Actually, this position is to some degree accurate but to locate the goal or function of liturgy at this point is problematic.



identified as religious in the past has become part of the psychic complex which constitutes their religious sensitivity. Actions such as kneeling, bowing the head, repeating words or songs familiar from the past can induce attitudes not initially present.<sup>31</sup>

Here the function or goal of physical action is not symbolization of feeling or even an intuitive correlation of dynamics of feeling but the evocation of the actual feeling into subjective immediacy.

The second challenge is a thornier problem and centers in the person's sense of integrity. This challenge is often behind such comments as: "I won't repeat that creed; I don't believe it;" "I can't sing 'A Mighty Fortress' because it talks about devils and I don't think devils exist;" "Why should we read that prayer of confession? I don't do any of the bad things it mentions;" or "How can I pray for the President? I don't have any positive feelings for him at all. It would be hypocritical." Despite the superficiality of some of these comments, the concern which underlies them is crucial. Each of these comments implies that a person perceives his sense of integrity to be threatened by some liturgical form--by affirming something he does not consciously believe to be true, by expressing some emotional dynamic he has never felt, or by acting as if he now felt a way he does not. These are serious challenges

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<sup>31</sup>Paul W. Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), pp. 318-319.

to which liturgical experts have been too insensitive. For all persons, there is a need for consistent self-identity and for a unified world which "hangs together." And it appears to many that acting out some liturgical form which contains motifs from an alien worldview or which asks them to say something about themselves that they do not at that moment feel is the height of personal violation.

Men fight passionately against being forced to do lip-service, because the enactment of a rite is always, in some measure, assent to its meaning; so that the very expression of an alien mythology, incompatible with one's own vision of "fact" or "truth," works to the corruption of that vision. It is a breach of personal-ity. To be obliged to confess, teach, or acclaim falsehood is always felt as an insult exceeding even ridicule and abuse.<sup>32</sup>

In particular, this is a long-standing critique of "high church" liturgy by "low churchmen"--the sense that "liturgical worship" is perfunctorily "going through the motions" or paying "lip-service" without feeling, believing, or experiencing the content of the form. But more broadly, in the contemporary church all Christians are sensitive to this issue. So much of the modern attack on the church has centered on the discrepancy between the church's profession and action that few feel comfortable affirming anything more than what is part of their own personal individual experience.

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<sup>32</sup>Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, p. 244.

Now, let us consider these challenges in turn-- first, the challenge that liturgy should be seen as an occasion for religious experience. The fundamental problem with this challenge is that defining the liturgy as the primary locus of divine grace in human existence functions to denigrate the presence of God throughout *all* of human life. This, of course, is seldom the intention of such definition, but it is an almost inevitable result.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, centering religious significance in ritual activity contradicts the clear intention of Jesus.<sup>34</sup> For example, his disregard of Sabbath observance in the face of human need<sup>35</sup> and his sense of the immediate availability of God (especially in the motif of the nearness of the kingdom of God<sup>36</sup>) argue against locating grace primarily in any ritual or liturgical activity. It is also difficult to make theological sense of the notion that God's grace is *speci-ally* present liturgically. In an article which attempts

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<sup>33</sup>Wilfred M. Bailey, *Awakened Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 73: "To consider that services of worship are *the* meeting with God, and not the occasion of dramatizing, infers that he meets us only once a week under certain circumstances, and only then when we name him."

<sup>34</sup>Will Adam, "Outdated and Modern Forms of Worship," *Studia Liturgica*, VII (1970), 97-103.

<sup>35</sup>See Mk. 3:1-6 and Lk. 6:1-11.

<sup>36</sup>See references in Chapter 1, note 61.

to make sense of the doctrine of eucharistic "real presence," Cobb and Overman easily demonstrate from a Whiteheadian perspective how God and Jesus are "really present" in the Lord's Supper, but they are unable to show how this presence is different from his presence throughout human experience.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, the modern desire for religious experience within the liturgy may be as much the result of the poverty of experience in the secular world as it is the result of sound liturgical understanding. The church's facilitation of persons' openness to experiences of grace in non-liturgical settings may do more for the renewal of the liturgy than the use of the liturgy for this purpose. We have already seen the dependence of the liturgy in contemporary experiences of grace; but when such experience is absent, the liturgy is often used to fill in the gap. And the result is that the function of the liturgy in articulating, clarifying, organizing, and interpreting religious experience at a feeling level is degraded.

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<sup>37</sup> John B. Cobb, Jr., and Richard H. Overman, "An Ontological Approach to the 'Real Presence' in the Lord's Supper," *Journal of the Interseminary Movement of the Southwest*, Pilot Issue (1962), p. 46. Cobb and Overman, however, do posit that, although the manner of presence may not be different, the eucharistic setting *may* "at times and for some" heighten and intensify the *experience* of that presence. This point has already been considered above. See above, p. 92.

There is a second problem which enters when liturgy is ordered primarily as opportunity for religious experience. If a particular kind of experience or type of feeling is seen as the goal of liturgy, then the temptation to use psychological manipulations to achieve the desired goal is almost irresistible. In one Protestant church in a Texas city, the lights are dimmed to a gentle glow whenever the congregation or minister prays. This practice functions not so much to articulate certain feelings as to evoke actual feelings into the immediacy of experience. If the patterns of this feeling were successfully articulated (instead of immediately experienced), then its sentimental religiosity would be more clearly available for reflection and criticism. Moreover, when a congregation is manipulated into certain feelings which are identified as "religious," they are likely to expect Christian experience to be easily achieved: after all, one only needs a rheostat! It is possible to express in significant form the experiential pattern of grace, but it is not possible to force another to experience it consciously. When this kind of manipulation is attempted, the result is often some form of sentimentality. This attempt to evoke a particular state of feeling popularly identified with being "religious" or "devout" is obviously a crude example, but similar (if less blatant) examples are rampant in the

modern church. This is often as true of "contemporary worship" events as it is of the popular piety of established forms. The use of balloons, funny hats, and noise makers in "contemporary worship" often function similarly to produce a sentimental experience of gaiety which is identified as "celebration of the gospel."

The difference between manipulation of persons' feelings and the articulation of a pattern of feeling can be an extremely subtle one. But the expectations the members have for each other and the liturgy often make the difference in the way media are used. Do the people expect to be made to feel a certain way by the liturgical event; or do they expect something else? The congregation's understanding and expectation of liturgy is fundamental. And when this expectation identifies a particular kind of experience (whatever it is) as the goal of liturgy, the route to its achievement becomes a secondary consideration. Then, a liturgy succeeds when the predetermined feeling is achieved, and the liturgy fails when the desired result does not emerge. This approach not only cheapens genuine religious experience when it does happen, it also poses for liturgy the impossible task of moving persons to specified states of feeling.

The view of liturgy adopted in this essay seems a better solution. But it should be made clear that this

view does not assert that liturgy *never* becomes an opportunity for genuine religious experience. Of course, liturgy does sometimes become a vehicle of religious encounter. Liturgy happens in the actual world of human experiences; and because God's grace is foundational to and constituent of every occasion of human experience,<sup>38</sup> potentially any occasion can become transparent to this foundation and allow grace to emerge vividly into consciousness. There is no reason to deny this possibility in the liturgy. In fact, liturgy may even heighten this potentiality since it is so much *about* grace. The testimony of many persons is that liturgy has become for them on occasion a significant religious encounter, and there is little reason to deny this.<sup>39</sup> But it is also true that liturgy does more than facilitate religious experience. By articulating the crucial rhythms of Christian existence, liturgy also informs the subjectivity of the participants. It clarifies their own religious

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<sup>38</sup>A good conceptual basis for understanding this assertion is John Cobb's theological use of Whitehead's cosmology. In this scheme, this assertion is based on Whitehead's category of the "initial aim." See John B. Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), pp. 127f., 181-182, 199, 226, and especially 232f. For a less technical presentation, see John B. Cobb, Jr., *God and the World* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 44-66.

<sup>39</sup>Cobb and Overman, p. 46.

experience, it sensitizes them to possibilities of experience which have not already been their own, and it opens the participants to the deeper levels of certain experiences which had only been seen superficially. And these results of doing liturgy are present even when powerful religious experience has not occurred.

The second challenge (the perception that liturgical forms violate personal integrity in some way) is similar to the first in that it emphasizes important elements which should not be neglected. Resistance to traditional formulations is often as much a desire for liturgical forms which have the flavor of real human experience as they are sheer perversity. And part of the basis for the development of contemporary (and even experimental) liturgical forms is this desire. Often, however, this resistance fails to make an important distinction. Langer makes a distinction between the representational surface of a work of art and the significant form which is articulated.<sup>40</sup> The representational surface of a work is that feature which suggests some recognizable object in human experience. Paintings often "represent" such objects--apples, vases, people, trees, flowers; and music sometimes imitates the sounds of the natural world--gurgling brooks, thunder, the

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<sup>40</sup>Langer, *Feeling and Form*, pp. 69-71, 76, 82.



songs of birds. This is the representational surface. And in this surface is articulated the significant form, that pattern of human feeling which is the content of the work. In painting, for example, the way the human figure is drawn--his posture, expression, position within the total work, the colors of his body and clothing--articulates a particular pattern of human feeling. The fact that a human figure (and not an apple, for example) is used in the representational surface is not unimportant because this often suggests the context within which the articulated feeling is to be located. But significant form can be expressed abstractly--without the aid of images from the observable world. In liturgy this same distinction is found. A processional crucifix "represents" Jesus' death, and the community gathered around the table "represents" the Last Supper and Jesus' resurrection meals with his disciples. But this representation alone is not the content of liturgy; it is through this representation that paradigmatic experiences of God's demand and God's grace are articulated in the liturgy's significant form. Often resistance to particular liturgical forms is centered on the representational surface of a liturgy and fails to grasp the significant form which is communicated through that surface. This, of course, does not discredit the challenge, but it does clarify this issue.

Now we can see that this challenge can be focused in several ways. The most important question is: Does the person who poses the challenge feel that his integrity is violated by the representational surface of the liturgy or by its significant form. If his resistance is to the significant form of the liturgy, he can mean this in either of two ways. First, he may feel that the gospel is not the truth about human life and, therefore, articulation of experiences of grace is either trivial or deceitful for him. Of course, it may be hoped that participation in the liturgy will sensitize him to the dynamics of grace so that he may identify them in his own experience. But we have seen that in our secular culture this approach is unlikely to succeed because the restrictions which secular persons put on varieties and depths of experience they allow into consciousness excludes precisely those dimensions of experience in which grace is most likely to be felt.<sup>41</sup> A more helpful approach to such a resistance (and indeed to this resistance in each of us) is the facilitation of persons' opening their consciousnesses to the neglected dimensions of human experience. (The small "growth group" model may be an ideal way in which the church could begin such a

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<sup>41</sup>See above, pp. 22f.

task.<sup>42</sup>) The second way resistance to the significant form of a liturgy may be focused is persons' feeling that their personal integrity is violated when they express emotional dynamics which they do not at that moment actually feel. In this case, the issue is probably much like the first challenge discussed above--that is, our hypothetical challengers expect the worship event to facilitate particular feelings or experiences. Only then is it appropriate to express them. Here, it may be helpful to clarify the function of liturgy. Many local churches have done little or nothing to clarify their own understandings and expectations of liturgy, and some educational opportunities could be extremely helpful. The input, moreover, need not be

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<sup>42</sup>Specifically how the church can actually begin to help persons enlarge the range of their experience is beyond the scope of the present discussion; but it is an area in which work urgently needs to be done. In terms of the resources considered in this essay, Chapters VIII and IX of Kelsey's *Encounter with God* are perhaps the most promising. Also, Frank Kimper (of the School of Theology at Claremont) has been experimenting with a short-term, small-group model for helping persons become experientially open to the dynamics of love. Kimper's work has important relevance to the concerns of this paper, but unfortunately it is not yet in print.

Another dimension of this problem is the improbability that many persons of secular mentality (within and without the church) will become open to such an expansion of their experience in the first place. At present I know of no resources which could give specific help with this problem. But perhaps the church's creative evangelistic energies could be usefully channelled into an attack on this problem.

nearly as technical as the above discussion might suggest. For example, Wilfred Bailey describes in a straight-forward way the importance of "doing liturgy" even when one does not feel like it:

Can we afford to say prayers of confession or prayers of offering when we don't really feel that way? We not only say "yes," this is possible, but that to do so is essential to our faith . . . . Our gospel tells us that we are to show the love of God to our neighbor whether we feel like it or not. The same is true in worship. We take on the role of one who confesses, one who praises, and one who offers himself without reservation, not only when we feel like it, but on each occasion. How truly then does worship reflect life!

. . . It is because we do keep forgetting that we participate regularly in this drama [the liturgy]. We cannot do without such constant reminder. Worship keeps reminding us of what faith "looks like" in our corporate and personal lives. . . .<sup>43</sup>

This challenge can, however, be focused in quite another way--on the representational surface of the liturgy. This resistance is usually focused on specific symbolic motifs in the liturgy--on speech about demons, on the theology of the creeds, or on any other feature of the liturgy which is perceived to be offensive to the worldview of the worshiper. For some persons all that may be required is learning to distinguish between the representational surface and the significant form. When this distinction is made, it may become possible to concentrate attention on the patterned experience rather than the non-literal

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<sup>43</sup>Bailey, pp. 74-75.

symbols which articulate it. But given the pervasive modern expectation of communication in literal (that is, discursive) modes, this distinction alone may be sufficient for only a few. Part of this problem is the difficulty modern persons have grasping the import of non-discursive symbolizations--especially when the symbolic motifs are not drawn from the ordinary experience admissible to the secular mentality. As we have already seen, when experience is limited in this way, it is impossible for grace to emerge into consciousness. And on a symbolic level, it is extraordinarily difficult to symbolize grace if the only motifs available are those which occur in normal secular experience. If, however, persons come to appreciate the broader ranges of their experience--especially dreams and phantasy--they find themselves exposed to a kind of symbolization very different from the directed, rational, logical, and literal forms of thought but very congenial to the non-discursive, intuitive, spontaneous symbolizations of liturgy and the arts. Learning to deal with these ranges of our experience can provide many of the skills and tools necessary to grasp the symbolization of liturgical forms.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Kelsey, *Encounter with God*, p. 187. C. G. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952, 1967), pp. 7-33.

Nevertheless, for most--and indeed, to some extent, for all--there is also a need for reconsideration of much liturgical material in view of its ability to communicate with modern persons. If a person is so preoccupied with a particular image or phrase that he cannot perceive the significant form, then the liturgy has failed to communicate anyhow. Moreover, many feel a need for liturgy which has the "feel" of contemporary experience. Of course, as we have said, this is primarily an experiential problem. But as we find ourselves more and more in contact with wider ranges and deeper dimensions of our experience, many will probably desire a liturgy which seems to emerge more directly out of the dynamics of contemporary existence. This is a legitimate desire--one that must be dealt with constructively. But the solution is not simple. Tinkering with traditional forms is likely to obscure the pattern of experience they were designed to reveal;<sup>45</sup> and the creation of wholly new forms is handicapped by not having at hand the kinds of paradigmatic events out of which the New Testament church fashioned the first Christian liturgies. The difficulty which arises is that it is not simple to find liturgical forms which accurately and emphatically articulate the rhythms of the gospel. And most of the best ones

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<sup>45</sup>Bailey, pp. 103-104.

we have are also among the oldest--e.g., the basic shape of eucharistic action and the passing of the peace. And since the significant form *is* the content and is articulated by the representational surface, it is not always even possible to express the same content differently. The task is not impossible, but neither is it easy. It will involve critical examination of our entire store of liturgical material to determine its expressive quality and its ability to articulate the form of the gospel in a way that will resonate with the genuine religious experience of contemporary persons. This may be a painful task because its result may be the necessity of putting aside (at least temporarily) some of the most cherished and longest used forms of liturgical expression.

From this discussion it should be clear that the way to liturgical renewal is a complex one. The dependence of the liturgy on experience calls for genuinely contemporary conscious experiences of grace as a pre-condition of vital liturgy. And the understanding of liturgy's relation to experience developed here calls for education in which Christian persons grapple with their understandings and expectations of worship events. And, as we have now finally begun to suggest, there are also specifically liturgical tasks which must be performed if liturgical renewal is to be an actuality. Let us now consider these.

## CHAPTER 4

### TOWARD LITURGICAL RENEWAL

Let us assume that the secular restrictions of human experience are overcome and that large segments of the modern world come to see human experience as richer and more varied than the psychological processing of sense data. Let us also assume that the churches participate in this movement and that many Christians find it increasingly possible to identify God concretely in their actual experience. If such assumptions should become descriptions of actuality, it would mean that (for many Christian persons) Christian existence in the modern world had been significantly modified. Such modifications have occurred before and need not necessarily be feared. As Cobb says, "Contemporary Christian existence is far removed from that of the Middle Ages, and both are far removed from that of the primitive church."<sup>1</sup> Christian existence can be embodied in a diversity of "modes" and has been throughout the history of the church and even within the same historical periods. We cannot know whether the transformation of the above "assumptions" into "descriptions of reality" would

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<sup>1</sup>John B. Cobb, Jr., *Structure of Christian Existence* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), p. 139.



produce a new mode of Christian existence; but, even if the modifications were not so far-reaching, significant changes within the contemporary modes of Christian existence would be called for. Whatever the extent of the modifications, liturgy has an important role to play in them. Since liturgy is the corporate articulation of the subjective dynamics of Christian existence, it is a fundamental means by which modifications in Christian existence are *existentially* clarified and integrated into the church's self-understanding. Perhaps the most obvious recent example of this is the liturgical incorporation of "celebration." This was a necessary correction to the excesses of the sober and penitential piety of American Christians. That the festive aspects of Christian worship have in many instances become similarly excessive should not hinder our appreciation of them. The important point is that by inclusion in the church's liturgies, celebration became more clearly articulated as a significant aspect of Christian existence. Though it has long been present in the lives of many Christians, its liturgical articulation made it clearer and more "graspable" as a significant feature of Christian life.

The crucial *liturgical* question, then, is: can the liturgy articulate the subjective dynamics of a new mode of Christian existence--or renewed forms of present

modes? For the liturgy to do this, it must do two things. First, it must continue to clarify, interpret, and maximize at the level of feeling those features of Christian existence which are present in all of its modes and which make Christian existence distinctively *Christian*. Second, the liturgy must identify and articulate the dynamics of the specifically "new" features of experience and thought which may characterize a vigorous and powerful contemporary form of Christian existence. The liturgy must both maintain that which is distinctively Christian and discover that which is new and valuable in human experience and which can be integrated into a new and vigorous form of Christian existence. The specific content of these two liturgical tasks has already been considered in earlier chapters; we have identified that which distinctively characterizes Christian existence as grace,<sup>2</sup> and we have pointed to renewed openness to the breadth and depth of human experience as a feature of our contemporary world which opens possibilities of overcoming the poverty of human experience and of admitting God's grace into consciousness.<sup>3</sup> Obviously, grace is not the totality of the distinctiveness

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<sup>2</sup>The understanding of how grace is distinctively characteristic of Christian existence is developed in Appendix A. See also above Chapter 1, n. 2.

<sup>3</sup>See above, Chapter 1, pp. 46f.

of Christian existence, and enlarging the scope of human experience is not the totality of that which is new and valuable in the contemporary world. And a fully-renewed liturgy would have to take account of more than both of them.<sup>4</sup> But each of them is crucial in its own way, and we may take them for the purposes of this discussion as the necessary content of the two tasks which liturgy must perform to achieve renewal.

The liturgical dimension of Christian renewal, then, hangs on this double task: articulating the classic dynamics of grace in ways which vividly relate that articulation to contemporary experiences of grace. But the specific liturgical modifications which are needed to achieve these goals are not yet clear. These modifications, moreover, can only become clear to us as they grow out of the work of Christian communities which grapple with their experiences and their liturgy. Rational reflection alone cannot provide the answers, cannot point us to the specific

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<sup>4</sup>For example, Christian existence also characteristically includes missional love, an intense kind of responsibility, and what Cobb calls "self-conscious, self-transcendent selfhood"--none of which are precisely identical to grace. And the contemporary world includes many novelties besides the expansion of human experience--like electronic communication systems, space travel, and an intense meeting of Eastern and Western civilizations.

ways in which the liturgy needs to be modified.<sup>5</sup> Although we cannot yet tell the future forms of Christian liturgy, perhaps we can begin to design the kinds of events out of which the future forms can emerge. The task of this chapter is not the development of a complete program which could accomplish this liturgical task. Instead, we will consider *one* way in which a community might go about this task.

Let us begin by considering an actual "experiment" with a particular style of liturgy which was conducted at the School of Theology at Claremont; then we can look at the further possibilities of this style and at the development of this style into a context for liturgical experimentation. The use of informal, small group settings as opportunities for corporate worship has not been uncommon in the history of the church. And this general liturgical style had been used in Claremont for several years before the experiment which concerns us here began. But the publication in early 1970 of the *Episcopal Prayer Book Studies*, 21: *The Holy Eucharist*<sup>6</sup> sparked renewed interest in this

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. Paul W. Hoon, *Integrity of Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), pp. 45ff.; and Alexander Schmemmann, "Worship in a Secular Age," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, XVI (1972), 9-10.

<sup>6</sup>*The Holy Eucharist* (New York: Church Hymnal Corp., 1970).

liturgical style at Claremont. This booklet contained three "trial liturgies," one of which was only an outline:

THE PEOPLE AND PRIEST

gather in the lord's name

proclaim and respond to the word of god

the proclamation and response may include, in addition to a reading from the gospel, other readings, song, talk, dance, instrumental music, other art forms, silence.

pray for the world and the church

exchange the peace

prepare the table

some of those present prepare the table, the bread, the cup of wine, and other offerings, are placed upon it.

make eucharist

the great thanksgiving is said by the priest in the name of the gathering, using one of the eucharistic prayers provided. In the course of the prayer, he takes the bread and cup into his hands, or places his hand upon them.

the people respond--amen!

break the bread

eat and drink together

the body and blood of the lord are shared in a reverent manner; after all have received, any of the sacrament that remains is then consumed.<sup>7</sup>

This outline was adapted twice for use at the School of Theology. The first adaptation was very structured, and

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 98-99.

proved cumbersome in informal settings.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, it was adapted again into a series of questions:

#### HOUSE MASS<sup>9</sup> OUTLINE

Why do we come together for worship? [1]  
 Where do our lives feel unfulfilled, partial, incomplete, broken? [2]  
 Where do our lives feel fulfilled, whole, completed, healed? [3]  
 What is the Gospel? Where do we experience it? Why is it important to us? [4]  
 What are we concerned, anxious, troubled, pained about in our world? [5]  
 What are we thankful for? [6]

"Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." [7]

Despite the awkwardness of these questions and their need for rephrasing, their flexible use facilitated and structured significant liturgical events for small groups of people in informal settings.

This is the way this liturgical style actually worked during the experiment at the School of Theology. A small group of persons (usually six to fifteen) met at an appointed place and time. A room with a carpet was usually

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<sup>8</sup>This adaptation is included in this paper as Appendix C.

<sup>9</sup>The term "house mass" is not altogether satisfactory, but it is used below consistently despite its deficiency because none of the alternatives seem significantly better. Others, like "house worship," "informal liturgy," "house church," either suggest something quite different or have an awkward feel about them. The term "mass" itself troubles some Protestants, but no real improvement has yet been found.

selected because this made it comfortable for everyone to sit on the floor in a circle. Everyone had a hymnal and a copy of the "House Mass Outline." At any point, any participant could propose the singing of a hymn. Usually a pianist was in attendance; this was particularly important because it made singing much more enjoyable and spirited. One person functioned as liturgist--a responsibility which was rotated among those who attended. The function of the liturgist was to use the outline of questions to structure the event and to keep the service "moving." The service began with a consideration of personal motives for participation--which almost invariably involved consideration of the importance of liturgy and Christian community. This was followed by sharing of pains and hurts, joys and hopes. Often this part of the liturgy ended with persons embracing and affirming each other ("the peace"). Next, the liturgist called the small group to focus on the meaning of the gospel. Usually a gospel lesson was read and commented upon by the liturgist; then other participants would share their thoughts and feelings about the lesson and the comments of the liturgist. Sometimes persons would share experiences in which the gospel had become clear for them or a scripture passage or other writing which had recently been existentially important. When this part of the liturgy "felt finished," the group began to direct its attention to

those persons and situations about which they were concerned: persons who were sick, "the war," the plight of the churches, the ravaged state of the earth, and others on and on. Normally, this sharing of concern was accompanied by prayer. Sometimes, the concerns were shared in the form of a prayer, and at other times they were simply said and then followed by prayer. This praying for the world was followed by giving thanks for all the good and enjoyable and strengthening parts of our lives. They were very personal kinds of things--thanksgiving for a test that was passed, a paper (or dissertation!) that was *finally* done, an experience of renewed openness with a spouse, a new harpsichord. These were times of laughter and joy as people remembered, shared, and found appreciation from others for the common, ordinary (and not so ordinary) joys and enjoyments of life. The liturgist, then, moved into a thanksgiving for all of God's "mighty acts" and especially for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This naturally included the remembrance of Jesus' last supper and his resurrection meals with his disciples and included also the "words of institution." The last regular part of the liturgy was the sharing of the bread and wine. The liturgist began by serving the person seated next to him who then served the person next to him--and so on all around the circle. Often this was accompanied by the



singing of a hymn.

For the purposes of our total discussion, the most important feature of this house-mass style of doing liturgy is its ability to combine into a coherent event both paradigmatic structures of the gospel and expressions of actual contemporary experience. The structure of the house mass is traditional and (at a general level) congruent with the classic shape of the mass. There are two dominant foci of attention and action--the Word and the Lord's Supper. The whole liturgy is introduced by a penitential rite, and the Word and sacrament portions are bridged by sharing of concerns (prayers) for the world. The use of this kind of structure in such an informal liturgy as the house mass gives the small group a sense of relatedness to the larger parish and to the entire church. Also, it maintains for the liturgy (and the gospel) a sense of objectivity. This seems to be a crucial element in informal, small-group liturgy. The natural tendency of such groups is to focus so intently on the actual, immediate experience of the group's members that awareness of God's grace in such experiences grows dimmer until the group ceases to understand itself as specifically Christian.<sup>10</sup> But the maintenance of an

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<sup>10</sup>This is one of the dangers of the house mass and of the house church movement in particular. For an example of a house church experiment in which this seems to have happened, see Erwin R. Bode, "House Church and Campus,"

objective liturgical structure mitigates this tendency. And when the structure is open enough to allow the sharing of contemporary, important possibilities for the correlation of classic structure and concrete experience emerge. The way this was normally done in Claremont was for persons verbally to share experiences, thoughts, and feelings. For example, the reading and commenting upon the gospel lessons is not restricted to a monological sermon. Each person is challenged to consider the lesson in terms of his own experience and his own experience in terms of the lesson. And the sharing and discussion of such reflection sharpens and intensifies a person's grasp of the gospel, his own experience, and the relation between them. In this way, the liturgy specifically challenges persons to reach for congruence between the shape of the gospel and the dynamics of their own experience. This occurs also around the

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*Social Action*, XXXVIII (January 1972), 27-29. A disconcerting feature of Bode's report is that he fails to grasp what is at stake. He seems much more concerned to praise the human potential movement than to show the practical relevance of the gospel. This comment is not meant to disparage the human potential movement so much as it is to point out again the difficulty of maintaining specifically Christian existence in the modern world. A somewhat less blatant example of this same problem is Philip A. Anderson, "Building a Faith-Trust Community," *Chicago Theological Seminary Register*, LXIII (February 1973), 1-29. What is at stake here is the sense of objectivity which traditional liturgy has preserved. Loss of this liturgical objectivity is loss of an important "reference point" for continually clarifying Christian existence.

sacrament. This movement of the liturgy is initiated by sharing of thanksgivings for the common and not so common joys of our actual lives. And this is immediately followed by thanksgiving for those paradigmatic manifestations of God's grace--especially the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. By means of this juxtaposition, it is almost impossible to miss (on a feeling level, if not at the level of conscious understanding) the correlation of God's grace in Jesus and his grace in our contemporary experience. Moreover, the relation of these two is heightened by the eucharistic action--receiving bread and wine from another, eating the bread and drinking the wine, and giving them to the next person.<sup>11</sup> We not only remember formulations of God's grace; we also act out our memory in a way that articulates the shape of the gospel. When this follows so closely upon the juxtaposition of our own experiences of grace and our memory of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the eucharistic action encapsulates both of these, correlates them, and lifts them together into decisive relevance for us at the level of subjective immediacy. The explicit

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<sup>11</sup>The informality and small group setting of the house mass make it possible for each person to take the bread and wine and serve his neighbor when he has been served. This is perhaps the best way to present concrete symbols of Christian community and the priesthood of *every* believer.

way in which this style of liturgy juxtaposes and relates our experience and the paradigmatic experiences of grace shows the way liturgy clarifies, organizes, and interprets human experience at the level of feeling.

It should be noted, however, that the house mass style of doing liturgy can fail in its attempt to be an adequate liturgical celebration of the gospel. And during the house-mass experiment at Claremont, such failure was not uncommon. Part of the reason for these failures was the fragile character of the house mass itself. The house mass is so weighted in the direction of contemporary experience that it is vulnerable to the undisciplined and unimaginative responses of its participants. The house mass is so open to *spontaneous* participation that irrelevancies and trivialities can easily accumulate to the point that the paradigmatic shape of the event is obscured. When the participants do not understand the liturgical character of the event and when genuinely liturgical reflexes are not part of their spontaneous patterns of response, the event can easily lose its liturgical character and cease to be a participational symbolization of the gospel. It may become therapy, informal conversation, or debate; but when this happens it ceases to be liturgy.

Another problematic feature of the house mass is its vulnerability to discursive language. If the Claremont

experiment failed anywhere, it was here. Graduate seminar-ians have an almost incurable propensity to symbolize reality in linguistic forms--a propensity which sometimes made the house mass more an "analysis of the theological implications of our current psychological and social milieu" than a *celebration* of the gospel. And when liturgy becomes a time of explaining and arguing, its celebrative character soon vanishes.

There are, however, possibilities for developing the house mass further in directions which would mitigate these problems. The use of more non-discursive forms of expression would not only curtail tendencies to explain experience verbally, but it would also give clearer direction to persons' spontaneous responses--and thus, also mitigate the first vulnerability of the house mass mentioned above. Moreover, these developments could actually heighten the expression of contemporary experience in the house mass because that expression could then use less discursive (and thus, more genuinely liturgical) forms. Let us consider four such possibilities for development.

It was mentioned above that hymns were normally used in the Claremont house-mass experiment. The use of music could be extended even further. The singing of the Lord's Prayer and the Sanctus at least (either in chant or modern settings) could easily be done, and some groups

might also enjoy the use of the Kyrie and the Gloria. Modern "folk" music has been used liturgically for quite a while now, and its use in the house mass alongside the more traditional congregational hymns could (if done well) also function to correlate through music traditional images and the "feel" of contemporaneity.<sup>12</sup>

Another possibility is group creation of visual art. Coogan warns that visual art is of peripheral value to liturgy because it is not a particularly participational medium.<sup>13</sup> This is true if the art work is introduced into the liturgy as a finished form. But there are possibilities for liturgical uses of visual art when participation in the *creation* of the work is part of the liturgy. One way this can be done is to respond to the appointed lesson by making a "corporate collage." Cutting pictures out of magazines and pasting them on the wall is only the most trivial form of the medium! The expressive character of the collage can

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<sup>12</sup>Modern liturgical music is a serious problem. This topic is unfortunately beyond both the scope of the present discussion and my own expertise. But it should be mentioned that the advocacy of "new music" is not a call for the uncritical use of anything which a publisher calls a "folk hymn." The development of a store of music which articulates the gospel, captures the feel of contemporary spirituality, and can be performed by a normal congregation is an urgent task. Where are Bach and Wesley now that we need them?

<sup>13</sup>William Jack Coogan, "Worship as Expressive Form," (Unpublished Th.D. dissertation, School of Theology at Claremont, CA, 1967), p. 37.

be opened up for persons by supplying, instead of copies of *Life* magazine (or *Playboy*), pieces of cloth, string, yarn, colored construction paper, or almost anything that can be fastened to a large piece of paper--as well as paints.

Such an activity can symbolize not only the shape of feeling in contemporary experience and the dynamics of the gospel but also can express the function of Christian community.<sup>14</sup> The collage emerges from the cooperation and joint work of all the participants. And it seeks to create a form which is fundamentally non-verbal. Of course, the "sloganeering" of the modern world may tempt persons to use words rather than pictures or abstract images. This, however, is as much an experiential problem as it is a liturgical one. When persons admit into consciousness the wider ranges of experience, imaginal expression often becomes more obviously appropriate. Persons who have found phantasy an important and enriching activity, often find that visual expressions can symbolize their experience much better than merely verbal ones.

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<sup>14</sup>The aesthetic value of a collage created in this way is likely to be minimal--especially at first. But this is not the only criterion of liturgical significance. The fact that the group creates the form together articulates some important dynamics of Christian community; and the participation which this process affords is itself significant. Perhaps it is also fair to say that the aesthetic value of such a collage may be no more trivial than most of the verbalizations that occur in "spontaneous liturgies."

A third possible way to emphasize the role of contemporary experience in the liturgy and also to heighten the non-verbal character of the house mass is the use of phantasy. We have already encountered phantasy above in our discussion of the wider ranges of human experience. Kelsey particularly emphasizes it.<sup>15</sup> One of the chief ways that phantasy can be used in a house mass is to have people reflect on the gospel lesson in a phantasy.<sup>16</sup> The gospel lessons of the New Testament are particularly good for this purpose since they are so often narrative in character. By meditation on the appointed lesson with a relaxed mind, one can allow to emerge into consciousness images which depict the events of the lesson. Often this enables persons to grasp the dynamics of feeling (as well as the concepts) which are articulated in the lesson. A variation of this is to ask persons to identify themselves as one of the characters in the lesson. In this way, a worshiper can imagine himself to be the prodigal son, for example. He

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<sup>15</sup>Morton T. Kelsey, *Encounter with God* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1972), pp. 131, 185-195.

<sup>16</sup>This discussion is not meant to disparage critical study of the New Testament. Imaginal reflection on scripture is supplementary to critical study--not a replacement for it. Phantasy is a way in which persons may relate to Biblical texts more existentially than critical study often encourages. On this point, see Kelsey, pp. 189f., esp. p. 192.



can imaginatively feel the desire for freedom from parental authority, the despair of eating with the pigs, and the joyous surprise at the father's acceptance. At this point, persons can be encouraged to allow their phantasy to roam a bit more widely in their own lives and experience. The leader might suggest that they think of a time when they felt like the prodigal son in his desire for freedom, in his desperation, and in his experience of being accepted. If persons' phantasies are allowed to continue for a short time in this direction some important correlations between their own experience and the traditional Biblical images may emerge. Such correlations, when they occur, have the advantage of occurring at the level of feeling as well as at that of concept. And this is a distinct advantage over correlations which occur only at the level of concept because more of the persons' total existence is informed by it.

Another important function of phantasy is that it introduces us to those wider ranges of human experience which we have pointed to so often in the course of this discussion. Phantasy is a way of thinking which is different from secular rationalism, and its use pushes us beyond the limits of the secular mentality. In phantasy we intuitively grasp our experience in a way that at first appears illogical--almost irrational. But if we persevere in its

practice, we find that it presents our experience to us in symbolic form which includes *more* of our experience than we have been willing to admit into consciousness. When a phantasy is finished, we may want to reflect on its images a bit more rationally, but we may find that the images cannot always be "rationalized" into secular categories. The practice of phantasy may push us to understand ourselves and the world in a new way so that we can account for the depth of experience which our phantasies may reveal.

There is, however, one problem with the liturgical use of phantasy. Phantasy is a private and individual activity; it is not expressed in perceptible forms and allows no group participation. Phantasy is not strictly a liturgical form, and its extensive use could begin to undermine the specifically liturgical character of corporate worship even in the house mass. Therefore, when phantasy is used in the liturgy, it must be used with care. Perhaps the best procedure is to follow individual phantasies with some kind of sharing--at least verbally and, preferably, less discursively. For example, phantasy can be a prelude to the creation of a corporate collage or to the singing of appropriate hymns. What is needed is some kind of corporate event which brings the persons back into interaction with each other and into the creation of *perceptible* forms. The eucharist is a good vehicle for this. The thanksgiving

prayer and words of institution or the accounts of Jesus' resurrection meals can provide the symbolic suggestion from which personal phantasies could begin; these then could be brought together in the sharing of bread and wine. And in this way, persons may not only find a way to correlate their own experience with the meaning of the eucharistic action but their perception of the rhythms of the eucharistic actions itself may be heightened and clarified. Nevertheless, whenever phantasy is used in a house mass, some care must be taken to preserve the participational character of the total event and to center the dominant symbolic activity in the creation of *perceptible* forms. But with adequate safeguards, phantasy can function well in liturgical settings--especially in the informal, small group setting of the house mass. And when it does function well, it has the ability to correlate persons' contemporary experience with the traditional images of Christian existence--and even more, to point toward those ranges of human experience which the secular mentality has regarded as phantoms.

Another resource for developing the non-verbal possibilities and the contemporaneity of the house mass are the sensory-awareness exercises of sensitivity training. These exercises have great liturgical potentiality since they are both generally expressive and explicitly non-verbal. These exercises facilitate the expression of feeling

through the movement and actions of the human body. In the exercises, feeling is not talked about, it is *enacted*. For example, in one exercise a person falls backwards and is caught and supported by a group of persons. This action may articulate the experiential dynamics of grace in a way much more vivid than a verbal penitential rite. Exercises like this one are especially useful in the liturgy because they are *essentially liturgical*. These exercises are essentially liturgical<sup>17</sup> because they are expressive activities which articulate the rhythms of human feeling in non-discursive ways; moreover, they are irreducibly participational: the activities cannot be completed without the active participation of the whole group. Although it has not been universally recognized, many churches have already been influenced by this phase of sensitivity training; the popular revival of the ancient "kiss of peace" clearly shows the mark of this influence. (This is not to degrade the role of historical studies in the recovery of this usage, but it is to affirm the influence and viability of certain sensitivity exercises.) The peace has become an embrace instead of a kiss, which perhaps points up its modernization. Liturgically, it is a clear symbol of personal

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<sup>17</sup>Whether these exercises are appropriate for use in Christian liturgy is a different question from whether they have formal liturgical characteristics as such.

affirmation among the members of the community, and it non-verbally "embraces" man's physical nature.<sup>18</sup> It underlines and emphasizes the eucharistic symbols which function similarly, but it (often unlike the eucharist) has the feel of contemporaneity. The use of the peace in a eucharistic service strengthens both the peace and the eucharist. The contemporaneity of the peace strengthens the relevance of the eucharist, and the juxtaposition of supper and embrace keeps the peace from degenerating into affability and social pleasantries. And it should be noted that the liturgical use of other exercises may need similar balance.

It is not necessary here to describe other specific exercises which have liturgical use; they have been described elsewhere.<sup>19</sup> But it is important to point out that these exercises need to be adapted for liturgical use with critical carefulness.<sup>20</sup> Not all exercises are readily useable in liturgies, and some are not particularly accurate

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<sup>18</sup>For a discussion of the role of human physicality in liturgy and the failure of Protestant worship to take this seriously, see James F. White, *New Forms of Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), Chapter V, pp. 100f.

<sup>19</sup>Bernard Gunther, *Sense Relaxation Below Your Mind* (New York: Collier, 1968), primarily Chapter 11, pp. 145f.; and Bernard Gunther, *What To Do Till the Messiah Comes* (New York: Collier, 1971).

<sup>20</sup>See above, Chapter 1, pp. 54-56 for a discussion of the ways in which many of Gunther's exercises fail to articulate Christian existence.

symbolizations of Christian existence. For example, one book suggests an exercise called "baptise your self."<sup>21</sup> The exercise is described as an intense sensory experience of water, and as such it could be a significant personal meditation. But the meaning this exercise would articulate in a liturgical context would be problematic for Christian existence: it would suggest that one *could* baptise himself. The exercises must be appropriated with care. They must be considered for their expressiveness, their ability to articulate the feeling-dynamics of experience with clarity and force; and they must also be considered for their ability to symbolize the gospel. But there are instances of successful adaptation--of which the recovery of the peace is the most notable. The informal setting of the house mass is an ideal place to begin to use more exercises from sensitivity training. And in turn, these exercises can develop further the non-verbal possibilities of the house mass and intensify in the liturgical form the sense of relatedness to contemporary experience.

We have now considered one way of doing informal, small group liturgy--the house mass--and four proposals for its development (music, group creation of visual art, phantasy, and sensitivity exercises). Neither the basic

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<sup>21</sup>Gunther, *What To Do* . . . , no page number.

structure of the house mass nor the four proposals are new. But their importance in this discussion is their ability to hold together in a liturgical form both traditional images of grace and contemporary experience of grace. But as well as the house mass style of liturgy (in its rather traditional form) can do this, something more may be needed from it. We have spoken already about the emergence of a "post-secular" world and about the possibilities this poses for Christian existence. To state the extremes: we may be on the threshold of a future in which Christianity could be a vigorous and vital form of human faith; or we may be facing a future in which genuinely Christian existence will be even more difficult to maintain than it is now. As Christians, we may hope that the former is the future which will become actual. But we must move beyond vague yearning and begin to envision such a future more concretely. And we, as Christians, can probably do this envisioning best in the context of our liturgical life. Thus, what is needed is an experimental context within which Christian communities can generate liturgical forms that express the gospel in ways which point toward and give Christian shape to a post-secular mentality. The house mass seems to be a good "laboratory" in which to conduct the "experiments" from which such liturgical forms might emerge. One of the crucial requirements of such an experimental context is that

it have some clear and objective way of keeping the gospel before the group.<sup>22</sup> Much liturgical experimentation has gone astray precisely at this point and has, by neglecting objective reference points, ceased to produce distinctively Christian liturgies. But if a group of persons lived with the house mass for a period of time before significantly modifying it, and, then, consistently used it as a base for experimental departure, the need for objective reference would probably be satisfied.

Beyond the basic house mass style of doing liturgy, there is a need for a method by which the liturgical experiments could be conducted. One of the freshest and most vigorous resources for conducting these experiments is Ross Snyder's methodology for creating "contemporary celebrations."<sup>23</sup> As we shall see, Snyder understands liturgy in a way similar to the understanding developed in this paper.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>See above, p. 149, n. 10.

<sup>23</sup>Ross Snyder, *Contemporary Celebration* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971); Ross Snyder, "Lived Moments into Meaning," *Chicago Theological Seminary Register*, LXI (March 1971), 1-20.

<sup>24</sup>Though Snyder's language is often different from that of this paper, his intention is quite similar. He wants groups of persons to participate in the creation of symbolic forms (Snyder: "memorable forms") which articulate the dynamics of human experience ("the forming energies of lived moments"). Snyder tends to place a greater value on discursive (Snyder: "logical") language in liturgical creativity than the basic position of this paper has. But



But he takes an important step further. Snyder not only values the inclusion of contemporary experience in liturgy; he suggests that Christian liturgy can *begin* with our "lived moments."<sup>25</sup> We pointed out in Chapter 3 that liturgy could take its general shape from the shape of our present living rather than from liturgical tradition;<sup>26</sup> and Snyder proposes a methodology by which this can be accomplished. But for this methodology to produce liturgies with rich texture and profound depths, we must first be open to the totality of our experience. Snyder says that we have to

. . . collect the data of this particular length of forming life-world and a self-in-world. To feel again the power of the experiencing and its leadings on. To bring up into conscious awareness the multiplicity, the thickness, the nuances and textures of awareness which contain undeveloped secrets. To recall *all* the significant contents of consciousness--feelings, intendings, decidings, pictures and imagery flashing in our mind,

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this is not an irreconcilable difference since Snyder does not rest with discursive language but pushes on to the poetic and the non-verbal ("artistic"). See below, p. 170. Finally, given the way liturgy has been discussed so far, Snyder's process may seem a bit contrived. But it should perhaps be better understood (not as a mechanical formula but) as a way to get people *started* in creating liturgical events.

<sup>25</sup>Snyder, *Contemporary Celebration*, p. 90. In what follows, I have not attempted to give a complete account of Snyder's liturgical program. The understandings and methodology which are considered are those which most directly contribute to the perspective on liturgical renewal developed in this paper. I do not think that what follows is unfair to Snyder's position; but neither is it a complete presentation.

<sup>26</sup>See above, Chapter 3, pp. 114-115.

ideas with which we tried to structure it all, the time-binding with previous experiences and expectancies about the future.<sup>27</sup>

This attempt to bring as much of our experience as possible into consciousness is the basis of Snyder's whole program. From this basis, he proposes a process of "transformations."<sup>28</sup> Experience is recollected and transformed into a "habitable world"--a culture of meanings which structures personal existence. Finally, personal worlds are transformed into "intersubjectivity," a corporate "People." A People emerges when persons find that there are other selves with whom they have a common history and a common destiny: ". . . a People is a circle of interlocked arms and interpenetrating minds that *believe in* each other and in something together."<sup>29</sup>

These transformations are for Snyder the heart of celebration. They underly it as the foundation and reason for celebrating, and they permeate the entire celebratory process. Snyder describes three dimensions of this process. The first dimension is experiential. Experience must be seen in its full richness, variety, and depth; the totality of experience must be allowed into consciousness. From

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<sup>27</sup>Snyder, *Contemporary Celebration*, p. 91.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 50

this deep and wide river of subjective experiencing, particular important experiences are lifted out for special attention. The second dimension is personal and corporate. Individuals and groups use large symbolic forms to organize, interpret, and preserve the meanings and values of their actual experience. Personal worlds and corporate cultures are formed. Individuals become personal selves and groups become "Peoples." The third dimension which Snyder describes is the specifically religious one. He calls it the "transhistorical," and here symbols are used to place personal worlds and corporate cultures within the context of the universal and the ultimate. In its "transhistorical" dimension, the process considers the dynamics, patterns, intentions, and energies of one experience in terms of those of *all* experience. Individuals and groups escape the tyranny of the present moment, the immediate experience, and consider their personal worlds and corporate cultures in terms of all that is--in terms of the "longest possible and most encompassing story."<sup>30</sup>

Snyder proposes a methodology for generating liturgy. The methodology has three steps which are parallel to the three dimensions of the process. The first step is "description." In this phase of the methodology, the

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

person or group attempts to describe its experience--a particular experience or a set of similar experiences--in as much detail and with as much accuracy as possible. This is an attempt to establish the "data" of the celebratory event.

The whole process

. . . begins as a descriptive art--as an attempt to capture all the perceivings and feelings and strategies formed in us during some length of lived moment. We are trying for the full complexity of what happened . . .

. . . We re-live the event--with particular attention to vivid peaks of feeling, to fleeting melodic curves of meanings, to projects and agendas within us (taken up, discarded, carried through), to impulses whose complexity and import are yet to be unraveled. We try for a fuller *conscious* awareness, knowing that at any given moment some things may have been on the fringes of our awareness that are actually much more important than we considered them at the time . . . .<sup>31</sup>

This descriptive step in the methodology requires the development of sensitivity to our own experience. We need greater abilities to sense and feel its dynamics, its crucial elements, its complex rhythms. The more sensitive we are the more data we can gain from our experience--that is, the more nearly complete our description of our experience will be. Step one of the methodology is basically an attempt to recall an experience in as much detail and concreteness as possible. Snyder thinks that verbal (better perhaps, poetic) description is part of this; but the important function of this step is the conscious recovery of

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<sup>31</sup>Snyder, "Lived Moments into Meaning," pp. 10-11.

the richness of actual experience.

Whereas the first step of the methodology attempts to recall an experience in as much concreteness as possible, step two focuses on the form, pattern, or rhythm inherent in that experience. The rhythm of actual experience is then expressed in large, symbolic, communicable forms. Thus, step two is an organizing and interpreting phase.

What were the forming energies that produced this life world, this existence, this experiencing? Their inter-structure and dynamic? Which vivid part became the organizer of the shape and meaning of the event?<sup>32</sup>

These are the questions Snyder suggests as aids to identifying the pattern inherent in the described experience. In step one, the description sought as much detail and completeness as possible; but in step two, "we throw out all incidentals, strip down the life world to its working essentials."<sup>33</sup> Here the goal is the *form*, the shape, the pattern, the dynamic movement and rhythm of the experience. Irrelevant detail is omitted so that the form can emerge clearly.

Once this pattern has been identified, step two goes on to name this lived moment. Snyder emphasizes the importance of searching for the "right word" which accurately suggests and focuses the existential significance of

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 12-13.

<sup>33</sup>Snyder, *Contemporary Celebration*, pp. 93-94.

this lived moment. If an inaccurate name is selected, this can trivialize the moment and hinder both our full appreciation of it and the fulfillment of the process.<sup>34</sup> As important as it is to find the "right word" to name a lived moment, it is even more important to articulate the dynamic of the experience in artistic forms.

Celebrative theologizing symbolizes its meaning more in terms of artistic forms than logical forms.

Both are necessary. But the image carries more of the originating fullness and more of the forming energies toward future, than does a logical proposition. By its very nature, art is concerned with intensifying, transforming, creating forms that vibrate with significance. Art holds together in one field contrapuntal forces that are still battling it out with one another.<sup>35</sup>

Beyond the naming of the experience, the celebrating person or community articulates the dynamics of the experience in significant non-discursive forms. Poems, contemplations, litanies, pictures, songs, symbolic acts are created; and then they are used again and again to "express the grace that came into us" in this experience.<sup>36</sup> This phase of step two creates what Snyder calls "memorable form." These are forms which have the capacity to preserve the essential

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<sup>34</sup>"Since it emphasizes meaning, celebrative theologizing is almost excruciatingly concerned with the right use of words, and the use of the most productive ones. It spends hours trying out which symbols most accurately document and profoundly evoke reality." Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

form and existential significance of particular experiences. The creation of these forms enables persons and communities to preserve important experience for future contemplation.<sup>37</sup>

Step three of Snyder's methodology is the interpretation of experience in its "transhistorical" dimension.

How do I differ from the things of this world? Is this difference the best clue I can get as to the goings-on of the Encompassing Mystery in which I participate? What do I touch when I touch Presence? What is happening when I hear an answering cry from another Thou?

When I have an important experience, is that all it is? Or is there present in it a Transhistorical which will be helping form many other situations [?]<sup>38</sup>

Step three is an attempt to penetrate the depth of a human experience and to account for those elements in it which seem to transcend the unique individuality of the individual experience. Step three looks for those feelings and intuitions which focus awareness on the "Encompassing Mystery" at the bottom of every human experience. In Christian terms, step three looks for the presence of grace; it considers the experience in terms of the mystery of divine love. This part of the methodology, as Snyder describes it, seems, however, to reserve specifically Christian interpretation to the end of the process. The early phases of

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<sup>37</sup>It can be easily seen that this point is very similar to Coogan's understanding of the way art preserves experience and makes it available for longer periods of time. See above, Chapter 3, p. 94.

<sup>38</sup>Snyder, *Contemporary Celebration*, p. 97.

step three require an openness to the experience itself. Step three asks: when specifically religious concerns are in view, what suggestions and intimations does this particular experience contain? But once the experience has been considered for its own religious suggestiveness, wider interpretations are appropriate.

One of the motifs which Snyder employs in the later phases of step-three interpretations is "paradigm experiences." He suggestively names these the "great ways [or, "preferred ways"] of being-in-the-world."<sup>39</sup> Paradigm experiences imply "styles of life worlds--and ways of bringing them off--which for this People are the actualization again and again of Life."<sup>40</sup> The "great ways" are accumulations of the meanings in a People's most important experiences. They articulate the way that People has perceived the "Encompassing Mystery" manifesting itself in its experience and the kind of world and culture and way of living which these manifestations suggest. The celebration of a People, then, is finally an interaction between its contemporary experience and its paradigms. Past and present apprehensions of the "transhistorical" are celebrated together so that the communal culture of the people is

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 70-71.



enriched, affirmed, enjoyed, and projected toward the future.<sup>41</sup>

Snyder's methodology is a tool for transforming lived moments into communal celebratory events; but it is not a "cookie cutter." It is not a way of cutting from the stuff of life a pre-determined, desirable figure. It is a tool for each community to use in its own way to make sense of its members' life together.

A communal celebration does not come about by selecting a theme, a slogan, a campaign, and imprinting it on people through the use of multi-media. A clever attempt to arouse people's emotions and impulses is not celebration. And audiovisual explanation of an important idea is not celebration. Celebration is the overflow of experience into exultant existence. Celebration cannot be contrived, but it can be arted!<sup>42</sup>

Each community must find its own "style," its own way of expressing its life experience authentically. Genuine celebration is a community's unique way of clarifying, affirming, and relishing the meaning of its experience--its great ways of being. For a community's celebration to do this well, it must have "liturgical quality." The community must find those truly expressive forms which freshly, forcefully, and accurately present the full meaning of its living. Liturgy must have "significant form."

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<sup>41</sup>Cf. Chapter 3, pp. 105f.

<sup>42</sup>Snyder, *Contemporary Celebration*, p. 87.

The form of a celebration is crucial--for the *organization and mode of participation in the celebration is its ultimate message*. The structure and tuning of the shaping energies of the celebration are its long term content. The patterned working which distinguishes and forms this particular people, its chief communication.<sup>43</sup>

For Snyder, then, celebration is neither a rigid repetition nor an impulsive, "formless" overflow of the immediate moment. Liturgy is to have spontaneity and immediacy, but it is also to have form and structure. It is to grow out of actual experience, but it is also to remember and value the paradigmatic events out of the past. When all these things happen, it is the work of a People who are

. . . clarifying, intensifying, putting into significant form their particular mode of hilaritas.<sup>44</sup> And so becoming even more "members one of another." Sufferings and triumphs and celebration have wrapped them all in a single fate. No one is left out. They have an enterprise moving through time toward destiny.<sup>45</sup>

Snyder's program provides some of the tools we need to develop the house mass into a "laboratory" for liturgical experimentation. Moreover, the house mass provides a

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 165. Italics Snyder's.

<sup>44</sup>Snyder defines "hilaritas" this way: "So first of all celebration is a style of life. It is a synonym for 'hilaritas'--a word used for centuries in the Christian community to name a life which is courage enjoying freedom.

"Hilaritas is a lively confidence that what one is doing will put forward the world even though the immediate society does not approve . . . ." Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

good setting for communities to learn to use Snyder's methodology. We have seen already that the house mass style of doing liturgy is a flexible one and that it encourages the inclusion of actual contemporary experience. It is a relatively short step from this basic flexibility to the inclusion of liturgical forms generated by Snyder's methodology. In this way, contemporary experience could be integrated into the house mass in a more genuinely liturgical way. The way house mass has generally been done, the experiences of the group's members were included only by verbal description. Thus, these experiences could seldom achieve the force of expression which the more traditional and less discursive forms of liturgical action had. But by using Snyder's methodology to generate liturgical forms out of our experience, this experience is given a vehicle which has liturgical integrity. It can enter the house mass in a truly liturgical way and can be built into the dynamic shape of the event.

Because the house mass is celebrated by a small group, it is possible for the entire community to participate in the methodological process. Every member can share in the development of the group's liturgical forms. This is an important possibility because participation in the process of designing and creating liturgy heightens persons' sense that the liturgy expresses their experience. This is

not to disparage the role of persons who have particularly keen liturgical and aesthetic sensitivities, however. We hope that we will always have among us those who can express the dynamics of human experience with clarity and force. The contributions of these persons will continue to be central elements of our liturgies. But liturgy is more of a "folk art" than an individual's creation; and it is important for the entire community to have some part in its design and implementation. When a community has developed some liturgical expertise, the participation of the entire community in the generation of liturgical forms is a natural step. The house mass both contributes to the development of this expertise and facilitates the participation of all.

Perhaps the most crucial importance of using Snyder's methodology in the house mass is the way this opens possibilities for relating contemporary experience and the church's classic liturgical symbols. We have mentioned already that Snyder's methodology provides helpful hints for expressing contemporary experience in liturgical forms. Articulation of our current experience need not be restricted to verbal formulation. We can begin to develop non-discursive, participational forms that express the meaning of our important lived moments and articulate the patterns of feeling inherent in them. This task is crucial.

If we can do this, we will then have the opportunity to relate our own experience in an *explicit* (and genuinely participational) way to the paradigmatic Christian events-- God's grace in Jesus Christ. We will have the raw material we need to build liturgies which have the fresh feel of the new and the integrity of the classic symbolizations. The house mass is an especially viable place for doing this experimental work. The house mass embodies the classic shape and symbolic motifs of the dominant forms of Christian liturgy. The integration into the house mass of liturgical forms generated with the aid of Snyder's methodology could begin to produce liturgies which articulate both the distinctive characteristics of all Christian existence and the special ways that grace is present in contemporary experience. Perhaps this integration could even do this without reducing one of these to the other: without simply repeating traditional gestures and hoping that this was also an authentic expression of modern religious experience; and without only celebrating the modern and hoping that the gospel would also be expressed. By integrating genuinely liturgical forms which express the meaning and the feel of contemporary religious experience into a eucharistic liturgy, we will be greatly aided in identifying, clarifying, and celebrating the presence of grace

in our contemporary experience and in heightening our participation in Christian existence.

It is difficult from our current vantage point to guess what these liturgies might be like. Snyder includes descriptions of two liturgies in *Contemporary Celebration*.<sup>46</sup> But these two are products solely of his methodology and have not emerged out of an integration of the products of his methodology and the classic shape of Christian liturgy. Nevertheless, we can risk a guess about at least the early stages of the proposed experimentation.<sup>47</sup> Three features of the house mass will most likely survive in the early experimentation: the basic two-part structure (word and sacrament), the use of the Bible, and the eucharistic action. The two-part structure of liturgy has been a viable way of organizing liturgical events for centuries. Even in protestant "preaching services," a basic two-part structure is discernible: the "preliminaries" and the sermon--

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 175-179.

<sup>47</sup>It should be remembered that this guess presupposes the house mass as the starting point from which experimentation begins. If this presupposition is not made, it is impossible even to guess what direction the experimentation might take. The position of this paper, however, is that, if some base or "reference point" (e.g., the house mass) is not maintained in the experimentation, it will be difficult to direct the experiments in genuinely Christian directions or to know whether the experiments are successful. The house mass is a particularly good tool for doing this because it provides the flexibility and freedom for experimentation in the midst of a classic structure.

each requiring about equal time. It is extremely difficult to sustain unitary artistic forms which occur as events in time for much more than thirty minutes. As long as liturgies continue to last about an hour, we can expect that they will be structured in two parts. The Bible and the eucharist are the two forms in which the gospel has been most clearly articulated. It is difficult (perhaps impossible) to imagine a genuinely Christian liturgy without either the Bible's or the eucharist's playing an important role. But the specific ways in which these two classic expressions will be used will only emerge as we experiment and judge the results. The experimentation might evolve in the direction of maintaining "part two" of the liturgy as the thanksgiving supper and using liturgical expressions of contemporary experience as "part one." This is only a guess, but there are reasons for guessing this way. First, it has some continuity with the church's liturgical tradition. The sermon has normally been a way of pointing out the contemporary presence of God's grace--of showing the relevance of the gospel. The use of different liturgical forms which articulate the "graceful" dimensions of contemporary experience is, therefore, not wholly without precedent. Second, this would allow a full consideration of the community's experience within the liturgy. Persons' correlation of their own contemporary experience and the

paradigmatic experiences of grace would be maximized. The reasons, however, are rather rational ones, and the liturgy is notoriously unconcerned with rational reasons. We cannot really predict the future of Christian liturgy on the basis of what seems reasonable. The future liturgy of the church will not survive because it is reasonable but because it captures the liturgical imagination of the church.

It should be remembered that this suggestion of an "experimental house mass" is one way in which the specifically liturgical task of Christian renewal can be engaged. But this experimentation must be accompanied by development in other arenas of Christian living. The one other arena on which we have also focused in our discussion is that of Christian experience. If development does not occur in Christian experience, liturgical experimentation cannot succeed. Primarily this means the broadening and deepening of experience--allowing into consciousness those kinds and dimensions of experience that we have relegated to triviality. We must now move beyond the secular limitation of experience and begin again to appreciate the full range of experiential possibilities. This is the only way that God's grace can appear in our conscious experience as a vivid and powerful factor. The entire enterprise of creating liturgical forms which express the dynamics of contemporary experience is squarely dependent on this expansion



of consciousness. Without it, our new liturgical creations can only paraphrase the headlines of the daily newspaper and whistle Pepsi-Cola's latest jingle. Without the expansion of our experience, we can turn our liturgies into sentimental carnivals of helium-filled balloons and confetti, but we will not be able to articulate the contemporary movements of the resurrected Lord.

One final concern requires some attention here: what is the relation between the experimental house mass and the normal parish liturgy? First, the experimental house mass is not a replacement or a substitute for the normal parish liturgy. One of the mistakes of the liturgical renewal movement in the local parish has been its use of Sunday morning worship as a liturgical laboratory. Robert Raines describes a cartoon which appeared in a leading national magazine. Two laymen who are sitting in church watch their minister rush with a pail of water toward what looks like a fire on the communion table. Upon being told that it is only a fire, one of the laymen responds, "Thank God it's only a fire! I thought it was another liturgical experiment."<sup>48</sup> The cartoon is amusing because it expresses the feelings of many churchmen. Bombarded with liturgical novelty, they hardly know when to sit, when to stand, or

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<sup>48</sup>Robert Raines, "Models of Ministry for the New Mentality" (unpublished lecture, Claremont, California, January 26, 1970).

when to go home. We cannot continue to be so cavalier about the worship of our Christian communities without paying a terrible price. What is needed is not, however, a moratorium on experimentation but an appropriate setting for its pursuit. An experimental house mass which does not replace the normal parish celebrations but functions alongside them is one way of both reestablishing liturgical stability on Sunday morning and involving the congregation in experimentation. Moreover, the house mass can be used in connection with the normal small group life of the congregation. Committees, church school classes, and task forces provide natural opportunities for informal, small-group liturgy. And the fact that these groups do more than worship together provides a store of common experience out of which they can be encouraged to generate new liturgical forms.

Second, the experimental house mass provides a testing ground on which new liturgical forms can be tried out and improved before they are integrated into the normal parish liturgy. The development of fresh and vigorous liturgical forms in the house mass setting can provide the means for renewing the parish liturgy. But it also provides a setting in which problems can be solved before "half-baked" novelties are offered as the bread of life. The church's liturgy grows organically; it seldom profits

from revolutionary alterations. Liturgical forms must often be lived with for a time before their viability and adequacy (or lack of them) become clear. Small groups of persons can serve the whole parish by living with liturgical forms to determine their significance. From this process, some new forms will emerge as authentic contemporary expressions of the gospel. And these then can become part of the parish's liturgy.

Third, the educational impact of the house mass strengthens persons' participation in the celebrations of the whole parish. As persons begin to perceive the rhythms of the house mass (its significant form), they also begin to feel more clearly those same rhythms as they are articulated in the parish liturgy. The intimate expressions of grace in the house mass point to the public expressions in the parish celebrations. This is especially helpful for learning to correlate one's own experience and the liturgy's symbolization of grace. In the house mass, this correlation is spelled out more explicitly than it normally can be in the celebrations of larger groups.

Thus, the house mass provides a place where these sensitivities can be developed so that they can also be applied to the parish liturgy.

The renewal of the liturgy in the near future means developing liturgical forms which articulate both the

dynamics of persons' contemporary experience in its wide-ness and depth and the characteristic shape of Christian existence. If the liturgy fails to do either of these things, it will not be genuinely renewed. But the process of renewal must be carried on without the total disruption of the congregation's spiritual support. The renewal of the liturgy needs to be an organic one. A renewed celebratory style must grow out of present liturgies--not overthrow them in a violent revolution. The best way to pursue this process is to develop some experimental context parallel to--and in interaction with--the normal liturgy of the whole congregation. The house-mass style of doing liturgy provides one viable context which could be developed in experimental directions. And Ross Snyder's methodology for transforming experience into participational symbolic forms provides some useful tools for the experimental development of the house mass. The house mass and Snyder's methodology together provide a basic framework within which the process of liturgical renewal could be conducted.

Finally, the future of the liturgy is part of the larger issue of the future of Christian existence. Can we begin to envision and articulate a vital form of Christian existence? This question will be answered largely by our ability--or inability--to move beyond the secular restriction of human experience and give Christian shape to the

ranges and dimensions of experience that then become available to us. Liturgy is a primary way by which we come to organize and interpret our experience in a Christian way. New openness to the totality of human experience requires from the church forceful new ways of identifying and celebrating God's grace in that experience. Again, the experimental house mass suggests one way of developing the forms of a truly contemporary and truly Christian celebration.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### THE STRUCTURE OF CHRISTIAN EXISTENCE

Throughout this essay, the term, "Christian existence" is used without explanation. This term comes from the work of John Cobb--specifically from his book, *The Structure of Christian Existence*.<sup>1</sup> "Christian existence" is an inclusive category which focuses on the way Christianity has influenced the way persons' subjectivities are structured. For Cobb, to be a Christian is to participate in Christian existence--to have one's subjectivity structured in a Christian way. This is a particularly helpful category for understanding the function of liturgy because it includes the emotional (as well as experiential and theological) dimensions of human living. For the sake of completeness and clarity, a brief outline of the dominant features of Christian existence is included here.

Cobb understands Christian existence to have grown out of and to have transcended prophetic existence--which, in Jesus' day was *best* represented by Pharisaism. Cobb points out that Jesus' own structure of existence and that

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<sup>1</sup>John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Structure of Christian Existence* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967).

of the earliest Christians were different;<sup>2</sup> but they also had important similarities, and it is these similarities which will occupy us here. Christian existence emerged out of prophetic existence as a result of a two-fold radicalization which was initiated by Jesus and continued (with some important differences) by the early Christians. The two-fold radicalization consisted of an intensification of the demand of God and a heightening of trust in God. Judaism had been aware of the distinction between an action itself and a person's inner intention to perform an action; but the two parts of the distinction "lay side by side,"<sup>3</sup> and the relation between them was not significant. Jesus, however, held action and intention in *close* relationship and placed a radical priority on the inner intention: "Even righteous acts were worthless in God's sight if they were not motivated by love."<sup>4</sup> Also known to Pharisaic Judaism was the supreme importance of love, but their concern for the law as the demand of God meant that love was interpreted in terms of the totality of the law. But for Jesus what God demanded was love of the neighbor; so, he reversed the order: the totality of the law was to be

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 110, 116.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



reinterpreted in terms of love for the neighbor. "No traditional law that interfered with the immediate and responsible expression of that love could be allowed to stand."<sup>5</sup> And again, the inner intention was primary; truly righteous action could only follow from genuine concern for the good of the neighbor without regard to the consequences for the self.<sup>6</sup>

The second way in which Jesus transcended prophetic Judaism was his radicalization of trust in God. Jesus' proclamation focused in his teaching about the kingdom of God. Cobb contends that Jesus' notion of the kingdom of God was a function of his "experiential knowledge of the immediacy of God"--a kind of I-Thou relation.<sup>7</sup> God was no longer remote and inaccessible (as he had been for prophetic Judaism), but was near and available. The special intimacy of Jesus' own relation to God was the source of the power of his authority,<sup>8</sup> and his authority was such

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.      <sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 134.      <sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>8</sup>Cobb's understanding of Jesus' relation to God has shifted since he wrote *The Structure of Christian Existence*. A later article which reveals this shift is "A Whiteheadian Christology," in *Process Philosophy and Christian Thought* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), pp. 382-398. In this article, Cobb understands Jesus' relation to God as even more intimate than an I-Thou relation. Here, Jesus' personal "I" is "constituted" by his prehension of God; and, at least in particular moments, Jesus was thus enabled to perceive and value the world in terms of the presence of God in him.

that in it people sensed the nearness of God. Moreover, because Jesus perceived God in this way, he could speak of a radical kind of trust in God--a trust which could confidently expect from God whatever was actually needed in that moment. The early Christians continued to trust God in this radical kind of way because of what God had done for them in Jesus' resurrection. They did experience God as available for them, but this availability was not so much in the form of a "Thou" (as it had been for Jesus) but as a "presence." And this experience of presence led the early Christians to speak of this kind of divine grace as "Spirit" or as "the Holy Spirit." St. Paul was careful to personalize Spirit in the understanding of the church; but even so, it did not result in an I-Thou relationship. What did result was an awareness of the presence and availability of the fully personal God to human persons in a very intimate way without loss of responsible personhood.<sup>9</sup>

This two-fold radicalization of demand and grace brought into being, Cobb believes, a new kind of responsible, self-conscious personhood which transcended that of prophetic existence. When Christian existence emerged, the prophetic seat of existence became relativized to the status of an impersonal psychic force--which could then be

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<sup>9</sup>Cobb, *The Structure of Christian Existence*, pp. 116-119.

called "will."<sup>10</sup> What emerged in Christian existence was a new organizing center for the psyche which was identified as the seat of existence. Cobb calls this new center "spirit" and the new structure of existence "spiritual existence."

The meaning of spirit can be most easily grasped by considering the radicalization of responsibility under Christian existence. Under prophetic existence, man was responsible for himself within the limits of his ability to choose.<sup>11</sup> Prophetic man understood himself as one responsible, but clearly there were things which were beyond his control and for which, therefore, he was not responsible. But Jesus and the early Christians radicalized that responsibility: Christian man experienced himself as responsible for the kind of self he was even when he was unable to choose to be different. As Jesus had demanded the impossible when he demanded that not only actions but also inner intentions and motives be loving, so the early Christian knew himself as responsible even for those portions of his experience which he could not control by volitional choice. Thus, he experienced himself as transcending his will; his personal identity was centered in a responsible "I" which

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 106, n. 9; p. 119, n. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 132-133.

was not limited in the way that "will" was limited. Cobb asserts that in Christian existence responsibility was ultimately extended: there was no portion of experience for which the Christian person could deny his responsibility. He was responsible for his actions; he was responsible for the motives for his actions; he was responsible for his desires for motives--*ad infinitum*! "At whatever level we ask the question about what we are, we also must acknowledge our responsibility for being that. We cannot simply accept what we are as the given context within which our responsibility operates."<sup>12</sup> Cobb, therefore, affirms that with Christian existence a new psychic center emerged which can be called "spirit." And spirit has no defining characteristics of its own--it cannot be identified with any of the functions of the psyche (like feeling, thinking, and choosing)--except *radical* responsibility for itself. Spirit not only objectifies and assumes responsibility for the impersonal forces within the psyche; it also objectifies and accepts responsibility for itself. For this reason, Cobb calls spirit "self-transcending self" and claims that it, as a basic intrapsychic structure, is final and unsurpassable.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 142-143.

But to speak only in terms of responsibility is to falsify the experience of the early church. Responsibility alone can heighten the grimmer aspects of prophetic existence into desperation because such responsibility is humanly impossible. But the experience of the early church was more one of joy and freedom than it was one of desperation.<sup>14</sup> Heightened responsibility was given *with* the energizing presence of God's grace. There was no need for desperation because God was giving more than could be assimilated, and along with the demand was given the ability to fulfill the demand. Joy was the appropriate mood because the early Christians were experiencing God as making the impossible possible for them.

Thus, Cobb affirms Christian existence as the high point of the evolutionary journey of Western man's subjectivity. It culminates man's struggle for individuality in a self-conscious personal selfhood that cannot be limited by the ability of his "will." And in its love for the neighbor, this individuality becomes the vehicle for a quality of relatedness to the other which is not limited by the needs of the self. And both of these are possible because of a sense of a present and available God who actively supports and enables this kind and quality of human existence.

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

## APPENDIX B

### "LITURGY" AND "WORSHIP"

The use of the terms, "liturgy" and "worship," often creates confusion because the terms are seldom used with much precision or consistency. "Liturgy" is defined rather carefully in the course of the above essay. But some clarity may be gained by an indication of the way these two terms are understood to be related.

The term "worship" is used by many Christians without much precision to refer to Sunday morning "worship service," to practices and disciplines of "personal devotion" or spirituality, and to "religious experience" in general--that is, any experience in which a person experiences the numinous and is aware of feelings of awe, adoration, exaltation, or other emotions which are identified as appropriate responses to the numinous, the sacred, or God.<sup>1</sup> In fact, this last meaning seems to be the root meaning in the minds of many for the word "worship;" and "worship services" and spiritual disciplines are identified as "worship"

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<sup>1</sup>Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1923, 1958). Morton Kelsey, *Encounter with God* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1972).

because of their potentiality for experience of the numinous and emotional response. Even for those who do not value the numinous experience as such, "worship" is often used in a similar way to identify *any* experience or event in which the "religious" or "Christian" experience (whatever its content--whether that of being accepted, participating in "community," or acting ethically) is present. Attempts to change the way people use this term meet with such tenacious resistance that the attempt seems futile. Therefore, when precision and clarity are desired, "worship" can be used to identify those events, practices, and experiences which now have or traditionally have had a high potentiality for this experiential component. Thus, "worship" becomes an inclusive category under which is subsumed "liturgy" (the corporate "worship service"), the spiritual devotion or practice of the individual, and "religious experience" in general. Though it may be argued that a person "worships" *only* when he has particular kinds of feelings or experiences, there is such a long association of this word with events in which this experience does *not always* happen (e.g., "liturgy") that this proposed usage seems best. What happens on Sunday morning can be called "worship," but so can a variety of other activities and experiences. When one wishes to speak precisely about corporate worship events, "liturgy" is a better term.

## APPENDIX C

### OUTLINE FOR HOUSE MASS

#### I. COMING TOGETHER

"Why are we here?"

[Members of the assembly may offer short statements]

#### II. GOOD NEWS ABOUT OUR LIVES

"How do we perceive our lives?"

[Members of the assembly may offer short statements]

*The Good News of God's Grace*

*The Peace*

#### III. PROCLAIM AND RESPOND TO THE WORD OF GOD

*Reading the Word*

*A Witness to the Word*

*A Brief Discussion of the Word*

#### IV. PRAY FOR THE WORLD AND THE CHURCH

[Members of the assembly may share their concerns by using the formula, "For \_\_\_\_\_, let us pray to the Lord;" to which the assembly shall respond, "LORD, HEAR OUR PRAYER." Or, members may pray extemporaneously, to which prayers the assembly shall respond, "AMEN." The liturgist will close the prayers with a collect.]

#### V. PREPARE THE TABLE

#### VI. GIVE THANKS

"What are we thankful for?"

[Members of the assembly may express their thanksgivings with the formula, "For \_\_\_\_\_, let us thank the Lord;" to which the assembly shall respond, "OUR FATHER, WE THANK YOU."]



*The Eucharistic Prayer*

- VII. BREAK THE BREAD
- VIII. EAT AND DRINK TOGETHER
- IX. DISMISSAL

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